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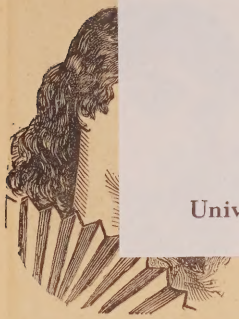

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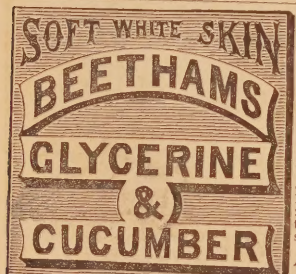

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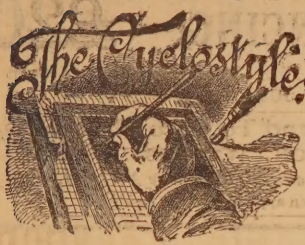

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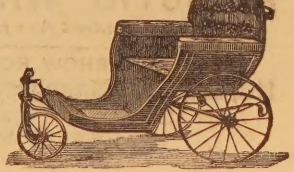

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PROEM.

Doch!—alles was dazu mich trieb,
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TOWARDS the close of a summer's day in Russia a travelling carriage was compelled to pause before a little village whilst a smith rudely mended its broken wheel. The hamlet was composed of a few very poor dwellings grouped around a large low horseshoe-shaped building, which was the manorial mansion of the absent proprietor. It was gloomy, and dropping to decay; its many windows were barred and shuttered; the grass grew in its courts, and flowering weeds had time to seed and root themselves on its whitewashed walls.

Around it the level ground was at this season covered with green wheat, spreading for leagues on leagues, and billowing and undulating under the wind that blew from the steppes, like the green sea which it resembled. Farther on were woods of larch and clumps of willow; and in the distance, across the great plain to the westward, rolled a vast shining river, here golden with choking sand, here dun-coloured with turbid waves, here broken with islets and swamps of reeds, where the singing swan and the pelican made their nests.

It was in one of those far-off provinces through which the Volga rolls its sand-laden and yellow waves. The scene was bleak and mournful, though for many leagues the green corn spread and caught the timid sunshine and the shadow of the clouds. There were a few stunted willows near the house, and a few gashed pines; a dried-up lake was glittering with crystals of salt; the domes and minarets of a little city rose above the sky line far away to the south-east; and farther yet northward towered the peaks of the Ural Mountains; the wall of stone that divides Siberia from the living world. All was desolate, melancholy, isolated, even though the season was early summer; but the vast-

ness of the view, the majesty of the river, the suggestion of the faint blue summits where the Urals rose against the sky, gave solemnity and a melancholy charm to a landscape that was otherwise monotonous and tedious.

Prince Paul Ivanovitch Zabaroff was in Russia because he was on the point of marriage with a great heiress of the southern provinces, and was travelling across from Orenburg to the Krimea, where his betrothed bride awaited him in the summer palace of her fathers. Russia, with the exception of Petersburg, was an unknown and detested place to him; his errand was distasteful, his journey tedious, his temper irritated; and when a wheel of his *telegue* came off in this miserable village of the Northern Volga district, he was in no mood to brook with patience such an accident. He paced to and fro restlessly as he looked round on the few and miserable cabins of a district that had been continually harried and fired through many centuries by Kossack and Tartar.

'Whose house is that?' he said to his servant, pointing to the great white building.

The servant humbly answered, 'Little father, it is thine.'

'Mine!' echoed Paul Zabaroff. He was astonished; then he laughed, as he remembered that he had large properties around the city of Kazán.

The whole soil was his own as far as his eyes could reach, till the great river formed its boundary. He did not even know his steward here; the villagers did not know him. He had been here once only, a single night, in the late autumn time, long, long before. He was a man in whose life incidents followed each other too rapidly for remembrance to have any abiding-place or regret any home in his mind. He had immense estates, north, south, east, west; his agents forwarded him the revenues of each, or as much of the revenues as they chose him to enjoy, when they themselves were satisfied with their gains.

When he was not in Paris he was in Petersburg, and he was an impassioned and very daring gamester. These great silent houses, in the heart of fir woods, in the centre of grass plains, or on the banks of lonely rivers, were all absolutely unknown to and indifferent to him. He was too admired and popular at his Court ever to have had the sentence passed upon him to retire to his estates; but had he been forced to do so he would have been as utterly an exile in any one of the houses of his fathers as if he had been consigned to Tobolsk itself.

He looked around him now, an absolute stranger in the place where he was as absolutely lord. All these square leagues he learned were his, all these miserable huts, all these poor lives; for it was in a day before the liberation of the serfs had been accomplished by that deliverer whom Russia rewarded with death. A vague remembrance came over him as he gazed around: he had

been here once before. The villagers, learning that it was their master who had arrived thus unexpectedly in their midst, came timidly around and made their humble prostrations: the steward who administered the lands was absent that day in the distant town. He was entreated to go within his own deserted dwelling, but he refused: the wheel was nearly mended, and he reflected that a house abandoned for so long was probably damp and in disorder, cold and comfortless. He was impatient to be gone, and urged the smith to his best and quickest by the promise of many roubles. The *moujiks*, excited and frightened, hastened to him with the customary offerings of bread and salt; he touched the gifts carelessly; spoke to them with good-humoured, indifferent carelessness; and asked if they had any grievances to complain of, without listening to the answer. They had many, but they did not dare to say so, knowing that their lord would be gone in five minutes, but that the heavy hand of his steward would lie for ever upon them.

Soon the vehicle was repaired, and Paul Zabaroff ceased his restless walk to and fro the sandy road, and prepared to depart from this weary place of detention. But, from an *isba* that stood apart, beneath one of the banks of sand that broke the green level of the corn, the dark spare figure of an old woman came, waving bony hands upon the air, and crying with loud voice to the *barine* to wait.

'It is only mad Maritza,' said the people; yet they thought Maritza had some errand with their lord, for they fell back and permitted her to approach him as she cried aloud: 'Let me come! Let me come! I would give him back the jewel he left here ten years ago!'

She held a young boy by the hand, and dragged him with her as she spoke and moved. She was a dark woman, once very handsome, with white hair and an olive skin, and a certain rugged grandeur in her carriage; she was strong and of strong purpose; she made her way to Paul Zabaroff as he stood by the carriage, and she fell at his feet and touched the dust with her forehead, and forced the child beside her to make the same obeisance.

'All hail to my lord, and heaven be with him! The poor Maritza comes to give him back what he left.'

Prince Zabaroff smiled in a kindly manner, being a man often careless, but not cruel.

'Nay, good mother, keep it, whatever it be: you have earned the right. Is it a jewel, you say?'

'It is a jewel.'

'Then keep it. I had forgotten even that I was ever here.'

'Ay! the great lord had forgot.'

She rose up with the dust on her white hair, and thrust forward a young boy, and put her hands on the boy's shoulders and made him kneel,

'There is the jewel, Paul Ivanovitch. It is time the Gospodar kept it now.'

Paul Zabaroff did not understand. He looked down at the little serf kneeling in the dust.

'A handsome child. May the land have many such to serve the Tsar! Is he your grandson, good mother?'

The boy was beautiful, with long curling fair hair and a rosy mouth, and eyes like the blue heavens in a night of frost. His limbs were naked and his chest. He had a shirt of sheepskin.

Old Maritza kept her hands on the shoulders of the kneeling child.

'He is thy son, O lord!'

'My son!'

'Ay. The lord has forgotten. The lord tarried but one night, but he bade my Sacha serve drink to him in his chamber, and on the morrow, when he left, Sacha wept. The lord has forgotten!'

Paul Zabaroff stood silent, slowly remembering. In the boy's face, looking up at him, half-sullenly, half-timidly, he saw the features of his own race mingled with something much more beautiful, Oriental, and superb.

Yes: he had forgotten; quite forgotten; but he remembered now.

The people stood around, remembering better than he, but thinking it no wrong in him to have forgotten, because he was their ruler and lord, and did that which seemed right to him; and when he had gone away, in Sacha's bosom there had been a thick roll of gold.

'Where is—the mother?' he said at length.

Old Maritza made answer:

'My Sacha died four summers ago. Always Sacha hoped that the lord might some day return.'

Prince Zabaroff's cheek reddened a little with pain.

'Fool! why did you not marry her?' he said with impatience. 'There were plenty of men. I would have given more dowry.'

'Sacha would not wed. What the lord had honoured she thought holy.'

'Poor soul!' muttered Paul Zabaroff; and he looked again at the boy, who bore his own face, and was as like him as an eaglet to an eagle.

'Do you understand what we say?'

The boy answered sullenly, 'I understand.'

'What is your name?'

'I am Vassia.'

'And what do you do?'

'I do nothing.'

'Are you happy?'

'What is that? I do not know.'

Prince Zabaroff was silent.

'Rise up, since you are my son,' he said at length.

The boy rose.

He was sullen, shy, tameless, timid, like a young animal from the pine woods. The old woman took her hands off his shoulders.

'I have delivered the jewel to the lord that owns it. I hav done Sacha's will.'

Then she turned herself round and covered her face, and went towards her home.

The child stood, half-fierce, half-fearful, like a dog which an old master drives away, and which fears the new one.

'These jewels are as many as the sands of the sea, and as worthless,' said Paul Zabaroff with a slight smile.

Nevertheless he resolved, since Maritza spoke truth, that the boy should be cared for and well taught, and have all that gold could get for him, and be sent away out from Russia; for in Russia he was a serf.

The boy's hair hung over his eyes, which were hungrily watching the dark lean figure of the woman as it went away through the tall corn to the white wood hut that stood alone in the fields. He dimly understood that his life was being changed for him, but how he knew not. He wanted to go home with Maritza to his nest of moss, where his bear-cubs slept with him by night and played with him at dawn.

'Farewell,' said Paul Zabaroff, and he touched his son's cheek with his hand.

'You are magnificently handsome, my poor child; indeed, who knows what you will be?—a jewel or only a toad's eye?' he said dreamily; then he sprang up behind his horses, and was borne away through the fast-falling shades of the evening, leaving behind him the boy Vassia and a little rough mound of nameless grass, which he had never seen, and which was Sacha's grave.

The four fiery horses that bore the *telegue* dashed away with it in the sunlight, scattering the sand in yellow clouds, and the village on the Volga plains beheld its lord never more in life. The boy stood still, and looked after it with a sombre anger on his beautiful fair Circassian face.

'You will go and be a prince far away, Vassia,' said the men to him with envy. The child could not have expressed the vague mute wrath and shame that stirred together in him, but he turned from them without a word, and ran fleet as a roe in the path which Maritza had taken. He loved his great-grandmother with a strong affection that was almost passion, though it was silent and almost unconscious of itself. She never checked him, beat him, or cursed him as the other women often did their

children. She did her best by him, though they dwelt in a miserable little *isba*, that often in winter time was covered up with snow like a bear's hole, and in summer, the fierce brief parching summer of north-east Russia, was as hot as a scorched eye under a sun-glass. Life was barren and wretched to her, but not to him. He was loved and he was free: childhood wants nothing more.

Maritza was a Persian woman. Years and years before, when she had been in her youth, she had come from the Caspian shore, where the land and the sea are alike alive with the leaping naphtha of the Ghebir worship: she had been born within the iron gates of Derbent, of Persian parentage, and she had known war and capture and violence, and had had many troubles, many privations, many miseries before she had found herself stranded in her old age, with her grandchild, in this little desolate village on the sand-bank by the Volga.

She was very poor; she had an evil reputation: nothing evil was ever really traced to her, but she had Oriental faiths and traditions and worshipped fire, or so said her enemies the black clergy of the scattered villages and their ready believers. Never did Maritza light a lamp at nightfall, but her neighbours saw in the act a devil worship.

She was silent, proud, fierce, calm, exceedingly poor; she was hated accordingly. When her granddaughter Sacha bore a child that was the offspring of Prince Paul Zabaroff, though she cursed him, the neighbours envied her and begrudged her such an honour.

Maritza had brought up the young Vassia with little tenderness, yet with a great yearning over the boy, with his pure Persian face and his beautiful fair body, like a pearl. The uttermost she wished for him was that he should grow up a raftsman or a fisherman on the Volga water; all that she dreaded was that the Kossacks would take him and put a lance in his hand and have him slain in war, as in the old stern days of her youth her lovers had been taken by the battle-god, that devoured them one by one, and her sons after them.

She never gave a thought to the boy's parentage as of possible use to him, but she always said to herself, 'If Paul Zabaroff ever come back, then shall he know his son,' and meanwhile the boy was happy, though he had not known the meaning of the word. He would plunge in the tawny Volga in the summer-time, and watch the slow crowd of rafts go down it, and the iron pontoon pass by, closed like a bier, which took the condemned prisoners to Siberia. Now and then a gang of such captives would go by on foot and chained; miserable exceedingly, wounded, exhausted, doomed to twelve months' footsore travel ere they reached the endless darkness of the mines or the blindness of the perpetual frost. He watched them; but that was all. He felt neither curiosity nor pity as he lay on the tall rough grass, and they

moved by him on the dusty, flint-strewn, ill-made road towards that chain of blue hills which marked their future home and their eternal grave. For sport the boy had the bear, the wolf, the blue fox, the wild hare, in the long winter-time; in the brief summer he helped chase the pelican and the swan along the sandbanks of the Volga or upon its lime-choked waves. He was keen of eye and swift of foot: the men of his native village were always willing to have his company, child though he was. He was fond of all beasts and birds, though fonder still of sport; once he risked his own life to save a stork and her nest on a burning roof. When asked why he did it, he who choked the cygnet and snared the cub, he could not say: he was ashamed of his own tenderness.

He wanted no other life than this rude freedom, but one day, a month or more after Paul Zabaroff had passed through the country, there came to the door of Maritza's hut a stranger, who displayed to her eyes, which could not read, a letter with the Prince's seal and signature. He said: 'I am sent to take away the boy who is called Vassia.'

The Persian woman bowed her head as before a headsman's glaive.

'It is the will of God,' she said.

But the time came when Vassia, grown to man's estate, thought that devils rather than gods had meddled with him then.

'Send him to a great school; send him out of Russia; spare no cost; make him a gentleman,' Paul Zabaroff had said to his agents when he had seen the son of Sacha, and he had been obeyed. The little fierce half-naked boy who in frost was wrapped in wolf-fur and looked like a little wild beast, had been taken from the free, headstrong, barbaric life of the Volga plains, where he was under no law and knew no rule, and passionately loved the river and the chase, and the great silent snow-wrapt world of his birth, and was sent to a famous and severe college near Paris, to the drill, and the class, and the uniform, and the classic learning, and the tape-bound, hard, artificial routine of mechanical education. The pride of the Oriental and the subtlety of the Slav were all he brought with him as arms in the unequal combat with an unsympathetic crowd.

For a year's time he was insulted, tormented, ridiculed; in another twelve months he was let alone; in a third year he was admired and feared. All the while his heart was bursting within him with the agony of home-sickness and revolt; but he gave no sign of either. Only at nights, when the others of his chamber were all sleeping, he would slip out of bed and stare up at the stars, which did not look the same as he had known, and think of Maritza and of the bear-cubs, and of the Volga's waters bearing the wild white swans upon their breasts; and then he would sob his very soul out in silence.

He had been entered upon the books of the college under the name of Vassia Kazán; Kazán having been the place at which he had been baptized, the golden-domed, many-towered, half Asiatic city which was seen afar off from the little square window in Maritza's hut. High influence and much gold had persuaded the principal of a great college—the Lycée Clovis, situated between Paris and Versailles—not to inquire too closely into the parentage of this beautiful little savage from the far north. Russia still remains dim, distant, and mysterious to the Western mind; among his tutors and comrades it was taken for granted that he was some young barbarian noble, and the child's own lips were shut as close as if the ice of his own land had frozen them.

Eight years later, on another day when wheat was ripe and willows waved in summer sunshine, a youth lay asleep with his head on an open Lucretius in the deserted playground of a French college. The place of recreation was a dusty gravelled square; there were high stone walls all round it, and a few poplars stood in it white with dust. It was August, and all the other scholars were away; he alone had been forgotten; he was used to being forgotten. He was not dull or sorrowful, as other lads are when left in vacation time alone. He had many arts and pastimes, and he was a scholar by choice, if a capricious one, and he had a quick and facile tact which taught him how to have his own way always; and on many a summer night, when his teachers believed him safe sleeping, he was out of college, and away dancing and singing and laughing at students' balls, and in the haunts of artists, and at the little theatre beyond the barrier, and he had never been found out, and would have cared but little if he had been. And he slept now with his fair forehead leaning on Lucretius, and a drowsy, heavy heat around him, filled with the hum of flies and gnats. He did not dream of the heat and the insects; he did not even dream of the saucy beauty at the barrier ball the night before, who had kicked cherries out of his mouth with her blue-shod feet, and kissed him on his curls. He dreamt of a little, low, dark hut; of an old woman that knelt before a brazen image; of slumbering bear-cubs in a nest of hay; of a winter landscape, white and shining, that stretched away in an unbroken level of snow to the sea that half the year was ice. He dreamed of these, and, dreaming, sighed and woke. He thought he stood on the frozen sea, and the ice broke, and the waters swallowed him.

It was nothing; only the voice of his tutor calling him. He was summoned to the Principal of the Lycée: a rare honour. He rose, a slender, tall, beautiful youth, in the dark, close-fitting costume of the institute. He shook the dust off his uniform and his curls, shut his book, and went within the large white prison-like building which had been his home since he had left the lowly *isba* among the sandhills and the blowing corn by Volga.

The Principal was sitting in one of his private chambers, a

grim, dark, book-lined chamber; he held an open letter in his hand, which he had read and re-read. He was a clever man, and unscrupulous and purchasable; but he was not without feeling, and he was disquieted, for he had a painful office to fulfil.

When the youth obeyed his summons he looked up and shaded his eyes with his hand. He hesitated, looking curiously at the young man's attitude, which had an easy grace in it, and some hauteur visible under a semblance of respect.

The Principal took up the open letter: 'I regret, I grieve, to tell you,' he said slowly, 'your patron and friend, the Prince Zabaroff, has died suddenly!'

The face of Vassia Kazán grew very pale, but very cold. He said nothing.

'He died quite suddenly,' continued the director of the college; 'a blood-vessel broke in the brain, after great fatigue in hunting; he was upon one of his estates in White Russia.'

The son of Paul Zabaroff was still silent. His master wished that he would show some emotion.

'It was he who placed you here—was at all costs for your education. I suppose you are aware of that?' he continued, with some embarrassment.

Vassia Kazán bowed and still said nothing. He might have been made of ice or of marble for any sign that he gave. He might only have heard that an unknown man had died in the street.

'You were placed here by him—at least, by his agents; you were the son of a dead friend, they said. I did not inquire closer—payments were always made in advance.'

He passed his hand a little confusedly over his eyes, for he felt a little shame; his college was of high repute, and the agents of Prince Zabaroff had placed sums in his hands, to induce him to deviate from his rules, larger than he would have cared to confess.

The boy was silent.

'If he would only speak!' thought his master. 'He must know—he must know.'

But the son of the dead Zabaroff did not speak.

'I am sorry to say,' resumed his master, still with hesitation, 'I am very sorry to say that the death of the Prince being thus sudden and thus unforeseen, his agents write me that there are no instructions, no arrangement, no testament, in short—you will understand what I mean; you will understand that, in point of fact, there is nothing for you, there is no one to pay anything any longer.'

He paused abruptly; the fair face of the boy grew a shade paler, that was all. He bore the shock without giving any sign.

'Is he made of ice and steel?' thought the old man, who had been proud of him as his most brilliant pupil.

'It pains me to give you such terrible intelligence,' he mut-

tered; 'but it is my duty not to conceal it an hour. You are quite—penniless. It is very sad.'

The boy smiled slightly; it was not a smile for so young a face.

'He has given me learning; he need not have done that,' he said carelessly. The words sounded grateful, but it was not gratitude that glanced from his eyes.

'I believe I am a serf in Russia?' he added, after a short silence.

'I do not know at all,' muttered the Principal, who felt ill at ease and ashamed of himself for having taken for eight years the gold of Prince Paul.

'I cannot tell—lawyers would tell you—I am not sure at all; indeed, I know nothing of your history; but you are young and friendless. You are a brilliant scholar, but you are not fit for work. What will you do, my poor lad?'

The boy did not respond to the kindness that was in the tone, and he resented the pity there was in it.

'That will be my affair alone,' he said, still carelessly and very haughtily.

'All is paid up to the New Year,' said his master, feeling restless and dissatisfied. 'There is no haste—I would not turn you from my roof. You are a brilliant classic—you might be a teacher here, perhaps?'

The youth smiled; then he said coldly:

'You are very good. I had better go away at once. I should wish to be away before the others return.'

'But where will you go?' said the old man, staring at him with a dull and troubled surprise.

The boy shrugged his shoulders.

'The world is large—at least it looks so when one has not been over it. Can you tell me who inherits from Prince Paul Zabaroff?'

'His eldest son by his marriage with a Princess Kourouassine. If he had only left some will, some sort of command or direction—perhaps if I wrote to the Princess, and told her the facts, she——'

'Pray do not do that,' said the boy coldly. 'I thank you for all I have learned here, and I will leave your house to-night. Farewell to you, sir.'

The boy's eyes were dry and calm; the old man's were wet and dim. He rose hurriedly, and laid aside his stern habit of authority for a moment, as he put his hand on the lad's shoulder.

'Vassia, do not leave us like that. I do not like to see you so cold, so quiet, so unnaturally indifferent. You are left friendless and nameless—and after all he was your father.'

The boy drew himself away gently, and shrugged his shoulders once more with his slight gesture of contempt.

'He never called me his son. I wish he had left me by the Volga with the bear-cubs: that is all. Adieu, sir.'

'But what do you mean to do?'

'I will do what offers.'

'But few things offer when one is friendless; and you have many faults, Vassia, though you have many talents. I fear for your future.'

'Adieu, sir.'

The boy bowed low, with composure and grace, and left the room. The old man sat in the shadow by his desk, and blamed himself, and blamed the dead. The young collegian went out from his presence with a firm step and a careless carriage, and ascended the staircase of the college to his dormitory. The large long room, with its whitewashed walls, its barred casements, its rows of camp bedsteads, looked like a barrack-room deserted by the soldiers. The aspen and poplar leaves were quivering outside the grated windows; the rays of the bright August sun streamed through and shone on the floor. The boy sat down on his bed. It was at the top of the row of beds, next one of the casements. The sun-rays touched his head; he was all alone. The clamour, the disputes, the mirth, the wrong-doing with which he and his comrades had consoled themselves for the stern discipline of the day, were all things of the past, and he would know them no more. In a way he had been happy here, being lord and king of the rebellious band that had filled this chamber, and knowing so little of his own fate or of his own future that any greatness or glory might be possible to him.

Three years before he had been summoned to a château on the north coast of France in the full summer season. It had entered into the capricious fancy of Prince Zabaroff that he should like to see what the wild young wolf-cub of the Volga plains had become. He had found in him a youth so handsome, so graceful, so accomplished, that a certain fibre of paternal pride had been touched in him; whilst the coldness, the silence, and the disdainfulness of the boy's temper had commanded his respect. No word of their relationship had passed between them, but by the guests assembled there it had been assumed that the young Vassia Kazán was near of kin to their host, whose lawfully-begotten sons and daughters were far away in one of his summer palaces of the Krimea.

The boy was beautiful, keen-witted, precocious in knowledge and tact; the society assembled there, which was dissolute enough, dazzled and indulged him. The days had gone by like a tale of magic. There had been always in him the bitter, mortified, rebellious hatred of his own position; but this he had not shown, and no one had suspected it. These three summer months of unbridled luxury and indulgence had made an indelible impression on him. He had felt that life was not worth the living unless it could be passed in the same manner. He had known that away there in Russia there were young Zabaroff princes, his brethren,

who would not have owned him; but the remembrance of them had not dwelt on him. He had known definitely what to expect of the future. Though he was still there only Vassia Kazán, yet he had been treated as though he were a son of the house. When the party had broken up he had been sent back to his college with many gifts and a thousand francs in gold. When he reached Paris he had given the presents to a dancing girl and the money to an old professor of classics who had lost his sight. Not a word had been said as to his future. Measuring both by the indulgences and liberalities that were conceded to him, he had always dreamed of it vaguely but gorgeously, as sure to bring recognition and reverence, pomp and power, to him from the world. He had vaguely built up ambitious hopes. He had been sensible of no ordinary intelligence, of no common powers; and it had seemed legitimate to suppose that so liberal and princely an education meant that some golden gates would open to him at manhood: why should they rear him so if they intended to leave him in obscurity?

This day, as he had sat in the large white courtyard, shadowed by the Parisian poplar trees, he had remembered that he was within a few weeks of the completion of his eighteenth year, and he had wondered what they meant to do with him. He had heard nothing from Prince Zabaroff since those brilliant, vivid, tumultuous months which had left on him a confused sense of dazzling though vague expectation. He had hoped every summer to hear something, but each summer had passed in silence; and now he was told that Paul Zabaroff was dead.

He had been happy, being dowered with facile talents, quick wit, and the great art of being able to charm others without effort to himself. He had been seldom obedient, often guilty, yet always successful. The place had been no prison to him; he had passed careless days and he had dreamed grand dreams there; and now——

He sat on the little iron bed, and knew that in a few nights to come he might have to make his bed with beggars under bridge arches and in the dens of thieves.

Tears gathered in his eyes, and fell slowly one by one. A sort of convulsion passed over his face. He gripped his throat with his hand, to stifle a sob that rose there.

The intense stillness of the chamber was not broken even by the buzzing of a gnat.

He sat quite motionless, and his thoughts went back to the summer day in the cornfields by the Volga; he saw the scene in all its little details: the impatient good-humour of the great lord, the awe of the listening peasants, the blowing wheat, the wooden cross, the stamping horses, the cringing servants; he heard the voice of his father saying, 'Will you be a jewel or a toad's eye?'

'Why could he not have left me there?' he thought; 'I should have known nothing; I should have been a hunter; I should have done no harm on the ice and the snow there, with old Maritza.'

He thought of his grandmother, of the little hut, of the nest of skins, of the young bears at play, of the glittering plains in winter, of the low red sun, of the black lonely woods, of the grey icy river, of the bright virgin snow—thought, with a great longing like that of thirst. Why had they not let him be? Why had they not left him ignorant and harmless in the clear, keen, solitary winter world?

Instead of that they had flung him into hell, and now left him in it, alone.

There was a far-off murmur on the sultry summer air, and a far-off gleam of metal beyond the leaves of the poplar trees; it was the murmur of the streets, and the glisten of the roofs of Paris.

About his neck there hung a little silver image of St. Paul. His mother had hung it there at birth, and Maritza had prayed him never to disturb it. Now he took it off, he spat on it, he trod on it, he threw it out to fall into the dust.

He did this insult to the sacred thing coldly, without passion. His tears were no more on his cheeks, nor the sobs in his throat.

He changed his clothes quickly, put together a few necessaries, leaving behind nearly all that he possessed, because he hated everything that the dead man's money had bought; and then, without noise and without haste, looking back once down the long empty chamber, he went through the house by back ways that he knew and had used in hours of forbidden liberty, and opening the gate of the courtyard, went out into the long dreary highway, white with dust, that stretched before him and led to Paris.

He had made friends, for he was a beautiful bold boy, gay of wit, agile, and strong, and of many talents; but these friends were artists little known in the world, soldiers who liked pleasure, young dramatists without theatres, pretty frail women who had taught him to eat the sweet and bitter apple that is always held out in the hand of Eve. These and their like were all butterfly friends of a summer noon or night; he knew that very well, for he had a premature and unerring knowledge of the value of human words. They would be of no use in such a strait as his; and the colour flushed back for one instant into his pale cheeks, as he thought that he would die in a hospital before he was twenty rather than ask their aid.

As the grey dust, the hot wind, the nauseous smell of streets in summer smote upon him, leaving the poplar-shadowed court of his old school, he felt once more the same strange yearning of home-sickness for the winter world of his birth, for the steel-grey waters, the darkened skies, the forests of fir, the howl of the wolves on the wind, the joys of the fresh fierce cold, the feel of

the ice in the air, the smell of the pines and the river. The bonds of birth are strong.

'If Maritza were not dead I would go back,' he thought. But Maritza had been long dead, laid away under the snow by her daughter's side.

The boy went to Paris.

Would it be any fault of his what he became?

He told himself, No.

It would lie with the dead; and with Paris.

CHAPTER I.

In the heart of the Hohe Tauern, province of lakes and streams, there lies one lake called the Szalrassee: known to the pilgrim, to the fisher, to the hunter, but to the traveller little, for it is shut away from the hum and stir of man by the amphitheatre of its own hills and forests. To the south-east of it lies the Iselthal, and to the north-west the Wilde Gerlos: due east is the great Glöckner group, and due west the Venediger. Farther away are the Alps of Zillerthal, and on the opposite horizon the mountains of Karinthia.

Here, where the foaming rivers thunder through their rocky channels, and the ice bastions of a thousand glaciers glow in the sunrise and bar the sight of sunset; here, where a thousand torrents bathe in silver the hillsides, and the deep moan of subterranean waters sounds for ever through the silence of the gorges, dark with the serried pines; here, in the green and cloudy Austrian land, the merry trout have many a joyous home, but none is fairer or more beloved by them than this lovely lake of Hohenszalras; so green that it might have been made of emeralds dissolved in sunbeams, so deep that at its centre no soundings can be taken, so lonely that of the few wanderers who pass from S. Johann im Wald or from Lienz to Matrey, even of those few scarce one in a summer will know that a lake lies there, though they see from afar off its great castle standing, many-turreted and pinnacled, with its frowning keep, backed by the vast black forests, clothing slopes whose summits hide themselves in cloud, whilst through the cold clear air the golden vulture and the throated eagle wing their way.

The lake lies like a crystal bedded in rock, lovely and lonely as the little Gosausee when the skies are fair; perilous and terrible as the great Königs-See in storm, when the north wind is racing in from the Böhmerwald and the Polish steppes, and the rain-mists are dark and dense, and the storks leave their home on the chapel roof because the winter draws nigh. It is fed by

snow and ice descending from a hundred hills, and by underground streams and headlong-descending avalanches, and in its turn feeds many a mountain waterfall, many a mountain tarn, many a woodland brook, and many a village fountain. The great white summits tower above it, and the dense still woods enshroud it; there are a pier and harbour at either end, but these are only used by the village people, and once a year by pilgrims who come to the Sacred Island in its midst; pilgrims who flock thither from north, south, east, and west, for the chapel of the Szalrassee is as renowned and blessed as the silver shrine of holy Mariazell itself.

On the right bank of its green glancing water, looking towards the ice-peaks of the Glöckner on the east, and on the south towards the Kitchbull mountains and the limestone Alps, a promontory juts out into the lake and soars many hundred feet above it. It is of hard granite rock. Down one of its sides courses a torrent, the other side is clothed with wood; on the summit is the immense building that is called the Hohenszalrasburg, a mass of towers and spires and high metal roofs and frowning battlements, with a huge square fortress at one end of them: it is the old castle of the Counts of Szalras, and the huge donjon keep of it has been there twelve centuries, and in all these centuries no man has ever seen its flag furled or its portcullis drawn up for a conqueror's entry.

The greater part of the Schloss now existing is the work of Meister Wenzel of Klosterneuburg, begun in 1350, but the date of the keep and of the foundations generally are much earlier, and the prisons and clock tower are Romanesque. Majestic, magnificent, and sombre, though not gloomy, by reason of its rude decoration and the brilliant colours of its variegated roofs, it is scarcely changed since its lords dwelt there in the fourteenth century, when their great banner, black vultures on a ground of gold and red, floated then high up amongst the clouds, even as it now shakes its heavy folds out on the strong wind that blows so keenly from the Prussian and the Polish plains due north.

It is a fortress that has wedded a palace; it is majestic, powerful, imposing, splendid, like the great race of which it so long has been the stronghold and the birthplace. But it is as lonely in the quiet heart of the everlasting hills as any falcon's or heron's nest hung in the oak branches.

And this loneliness seemed its sweetest charm in the eyes of its châtelaine and mistress, the Countess Wanda von Szalras, as she leaned one evening over the balustrade of her terrace, watching for the after-glow to warm the snows of the Glöckner. She held in her hand an open letter from her Kaiserin, and the letter in its conclusion said: 'You have sorrowed and tarried in seclusion long enough—too long; longer than he would have wished you to do. Come back to us and to the world.'

And Wanda von Szalras thought to herself: 'What can the world give me? What I love is Hohenszalras on earth, and Bela in heaven.'

What could the world give her indeed? The world cannot give back the dead. She wanted nothing of the world. She was rich in all that it can ever give.

In the time of Ferdinand the Second those who were then Counts of Szalras had stitched the cloth cross on their sleeves and gone with the Emperor to the Third Crusade. In gratitude for their escape, father and son, from the perils of Palestine and the dangers of the high seas and of the treacherous Danube water, from Moslem steel, and fever of Jaffa, and chains of swarming Barbary corsairs, they, returning at last in safety to their eyrie above the Szalrassee, had raised a chapel on the island in the lake, and made it dedicate to the Holy Cross. A Szalras of the following generation, belonging to the Dominican community, and being a man of such saintly fervour and purity that he was canonised by Innocent, had dwelt on the Holy Isle, and given to it the benediction and the tradition of his sanctity and good works. As centuries went on the holy fame of the shrine where the Crusader had placed a branch from a thorn-tree of Nazareth grew, and gained in legend and in miracle, and became as adored an object of pilgrimage as the Holy Phial of Heiligenblut. All the Hohe Tauern, and throngs even from Karinthia on the one side, and Tirol on the other, came thither on the day of Ascension.

The old faith still lives, very simple, warm, and earnest, in the heart of Austria, and with that day-dawn in midsummer thousands of peasant-folks flock from mountain villages and forest châlets and little remote secluded towns, to speed over the green lake with flaming crucifix and floating banner, and chaunted anthem echoed from hill to hill. One of those days of pilgrimage had made her mistress of Hohenszalras.

It was a martial and mighty race this which in the heart of the green Tauern had made of fealty to God and the Emperor a religion for itself and all its dependents. The Counts of Szalras had always been proud, stern, and noble men: though their records were often stained with fierce crimes, there was never in them any single soil of baseness, treachery, or fear. They had been fierce and reckless in the wild days when they were for ever at war with the Counts of Tirol and the warlike Archbishops of Salzburg. Then with the Renaissance they had become no less powerful, but more lettered, more courtly, and more splendid, and had given alike friendship and service to the Habsburg. Now, of all these princely and most powerful people there was but one descendant, but one representative; and that one was a woman.

Solferino had seen Count Gela fall charging at the head of his own regiment of horse; Magenta had seen Count Victor cut in two by a cannon-shot as he rode with the dragoons of Swartzen-

berg; and but a few years later the youngest, Count Bela, had been drowned by his own bright lake.

Their father had died of grief for his eldest son; their mother had been lost to them in infancy; Bela and Wanda had grown up together, loving each other as only two lonely children can. She had been his elder by a few years, and he younger than his age by reason of his innocent simplicity of nature and his delicacy of body. They had always thought to make a priest of him, and when that peaceful future was denied him on his becoming the sole heir, it was the cause of bitter though mute sorrow to the boy, who was indeed so like a young saint in church legends that the people called him tenderly *der Heilige Graf*. He had never quitted Hohenszalras, and he knew every peasant around, every blossom that blew, every mountain path, every forest beast and bird, and every tale of human sorrow in his principality. When he became lord of all after his brother's death he was saddened and oppressed by the sense of his own overwhelming obligations. 'I am but the steward of God,' he would say, with a tender smile, to the poor who blessed him.

One Ascension Day the lake was, as usual, crowded with the boats of pilgrims; the morning was fair and cloudless, but, after noontide, wind arose, the skies became overcast, and one of the sudden storms of the country burst over the green waters. The little lord of Hohenszalras was the first to see the danger to the clumsy heavy boats crowded with country people, and with his household rowed out to their aid. The storm had come so suddenly and with such violence that it smote, in the very middle of the lake, some score of these boats laden with the pilgrims of the Pinzgau and the Innthal, women chiefly; their screams pierced through the noise of the roaring winds, and their terror added fresh peril to the dangers of the lake, which changed in a few moments to a seething whirlpool, and flung them to and fro like coots' nests in a flood. The young Bela with his servants saved many, crossing and recrossing the furious space of wind-lashed, leaping, foaming water; but on the fourth voyage back the young Count's boat, over-burdened with trembling peasants, whose fright made them blind and restive, dipped heavily on one side, filled, and sank. Bela could swim well, and did swim, even to the very foot of his own castle rock, where a hundred hands were outstretched to save him; but, hearing a drowning woman's moan, he turned and tried to reach her. A fresh surge of the hissing water, a fresh gust of the bitter north wind, tossed him back into a yawning gulf of blackness, and drove him headlong, and with no more resistance in him than if he had been a broken bough, upon the granite wall of his own rocks. He was caught and rescued almost on the instant by his own men, but his head had struck upon the stone, and he was senseless. He breathed a few hours, but he never spoke or opened his eyes or gave any sign of conscious life, and before the

night had far advanced, his innocent body was tenantless and cold, and his sweet spirit lived only in men's memories. His sister, who was absent at that time at the court of her Empress, became by his death the mistress of Hohenszalras and the last of her line.

When the tidings of his heroic end reached her at the Imperial hunting-place of Gödöllö all the world died for her; that splendid pageant of a world, whose fairest and richest favours had been always showered on the daughter of the mighty House of Szalras. She withdrew herself from her friends, from her lovers, from her mistress, and mourned for him with a grief that time could do little to assuage, nothing to efface. She was then twenty years of age.

She was thinking of that death now, four years later, as she stood on the terrace which overhung the cruel rocks that had killed him.

His loss was to her a sorrow that could never wholly pass away.

Her other brothers had been dear to her, but only as brilliant young soldiers are to a little child who sees them seldom. But Bela had been her companion, her playmate, her friend, her darling. From Bela she had been scarce ever parted. Every day and every night, herself, and all her thoughts and all her time, were given to such administration of her kingdom as should best be meet in the sight of God and His angels. 'I am but Bela's almoner, as he was God's steward,' she said.

She leaned against the parapet, and looked across the green and shining water, the open letter hanging in her hand.

The Countess Wanda von Szalras was a beautiful woman: but she had that supreme distinction which eclipses beauty, that subtle, indescribable grace and dignity which are never seen apart from some great lineage with long traditions of culture, courtesy, and courage. She was very tall, and her movements had a great repose and harmony in them; her figure, richness and symmetry. Her eyes were of a deep brown hue, like the velvety brown of a stag's throat; they were large, calm, proud, and meditative. Her mouth was very beautiful; her hair was light and golden; her skin exceedingly fair. She was one of the most beautiful women of her country, and one of the most courted and the most flattered; and her Imperial mistress said now to her, 'Come back to us and to the world.'

Standing upon her terrace, in a gown of pale grey velvet that had no ornament save an old gold girdle with an enamelled missal hung to it, with two dogs at her side, one the black hunting-hound of St. Hubert, the other the white sleuth-hound of Russia, she looked like a châtelaine of the days of Mary of Burgundy or Elizabeth of Thuringia. It seemed as if the dark cedar boughs behind her should lift and admit to her presence some lover with her glove against the plume of his hat, and her ring set in his

sword-hilt, who would bow down before her feet and not dare to touch her hand unbidden.

But no lover was there. The Countess Wanda dismissed all lovers; she was wedded to the memory of her brother, and to her own liberty and power.

She leaned on the stone parapet of her castle and gazed on the scene that her eyes had rested on since they had first seen the light, yet of which she never wearied. The intense depth of colour, that is the glory of Austria, was deepening with each moment that the sun went nearer to its setting in the dark blue of thunder-clouds that brooded in the west, over the Venediger and the Zillerthal Alps. Soon the sun would pass that barrier of stone and ice, and evening would fall here in the mountains of the Iselthal, whilst it would be still day for the plains of the Ober Pinzgau and Salzkammergut. But as yet the radiance was here; and the dark oak woods and birch woods, the purple pine forests, the blue lake waters, and the glaciers of the Glöckner range, had all that grandeur which makes a sunset in these highlands at once so splendid and so peaceful. There is an infinite sense of peace in those cool, vast, unworn mountain solitudes, with the rain-mists sweeping like spectral armies over the level lands below, and the sun-rays slanting heavenward, like the spears of an angelic host. There is such abundance of rushing water, of deep grass, of endless shade, of forest trees, of heather and pine, of torrent and tarn; and beyond these are the great peaks that loom through breaking clouds, and the clear cold air, in which the vulture wheels and the heron sails; and the shadows are so deep, and the stillness is so sweet, and the earth seems so green, and fresh, and silent, and strong. Nowhere else can one rest so well; nowhere else is there so fit a refuge for all the faiths and fancies that can find a home no longer in the harsh and hurrying world: there is room for them all in the Austrian forests, from the Erl-King to Ariel and Oberon.

The Countess Wanda leaned against the balustrade of the terrace and watched that banquet of colour on land and cloud and water; watched till the sun sank out of sight behind the Venediger snows, and the domes of the Glöckner, and all the lesser peaks opposite were changing from the warmth, as of a summer rose, to a pure transparent grey, that seemed here and there to be pierced as with fire.

'How often do we thank God for the mountains?' she thought; 'yet we ought every night that we pray.'

Then she sighed as her eyes sank from the hill-tops to the lake water, dark as iron, glittering as steel, now that the radiance of the sun had passed off it. She remembered Bela.

How could she ever forget him, with that murderous water shining for ever at her feet?

The world called her undiminished tenderness for her dead

brother a morbid grief, but then to the world at large any fidelity seems so strange and stupid a waste of years: it does not understand that *tout casse, tout lasse, tout passe,* was not written for strong natures.

'How could I ever forget him, so long as that water glides there?' she thought, as her eyes rested on the emerald and sparkling lake.

'Yet her Majesty is so right! So right and so wise!' said a familiar voice at her side.

And there came up to her the loveliest little lady in all the empire; an old lady, but so delicate, so charming, so pretty, so fragile, that she seemed lovelier than all the young ones; a very fairy godmother, covered up in lace and fur, and leaning on a gold-headed cane, and wearing red shoes with high gilt heels, and smiling with serene blue eyes, as though she had just stepped down out of a pictured copy of Cinderella, and could change common pumpkins into gilded chariots, and mice into horses, at a wish.

She was the Princess Ottilie of Lilienhöhe, and had once been head of a religious house.

'Her Majesty is so right!' she said once more, with emphasis.

The Countess Wanda turned and smiled, rather with her eyes than with her lips.

'It would not become my loyal affection to say she could be wrong. But still, I know myself, and I know the world very well, and I far prefer Hohenszalras to it.'

'Hohenszalras is all very well in the summer and autumn,' said Princess Ottilie, with a glance of anything but love at the great fantastic solemn pile; 'but for a woman of your age and your possessions to pass your days talking to farmers and fishermen, poring over books, perplexing yourself as to whether it is right for you to accept wealth that comes from such a source of danger to human life as your salt mines—it is absurd, it is ludicrous. You are made for something more than a political economist; you should be in the great world.'

'I prefer my solitude and my liberty.'

'Liberty! Who or what could dictate to you in the world? You reigned there once; you would always reign there.'

'Social life is a bondage, as an empress's is. It denies one the greatest luxury of life—solitude.'

'Certainly, if you love solitude so much, you have your heart's desire here. It is an Alvernia! It is a Mount Athos! It is a snow-entombed paraclete, a hermitage, only tempered by horses!' said the Princess, with a little angry laugh.

Her grand-niece smiled.

'By many horses, certainly. Dearest aunt, what would you have? Austrians are all centaurs and amazons. I am only like my Kaiserin in that passion.'

The Princess sighed,

She had never been able to comprehend the forest life, the daring, the intrepidity, the open-air pastimes, and the delight in danger which characterised all the race of Szalras. Daughter of a North German princeling, and with some French blood in her veins also, reared under the formal etiquette of her hereditary court, and at an early age canoness of one of those great semi-religious orders which are only open to the offspring of royal or of most noble lines, her whole life had been one moulded to form and conventional habit, and only her own sweetness and sprightliness of temper had saved her from the narrowness of judgment and the chilliness of formality which such a life begets. The order of which until late years she had been superior was one for magnificence and wealth unsurpassed in Europe; but, semi-secular in its privileges, it had left her much liberty, and never wholly divorced her from the world, which in an innocent way she had always loved and enjoyed. After Count Victor's death she had resigned her office on plea of age and delicacy of health, and had come to take up her residence at Hohenszalras with her dead niece's children. She had done so because she had believed it to be her duty, and her attachment to Wanda and Bela had always been very great; but she had never learned to love the solitude of the Hohe Tauern, or ceased to regard Hohenszalras as a place of martyrdom. After the minute divisions of every hour and observances of every smallest ceremonial that she had been used to at her father's own little court of Lilienslüst, and in her own religious house, where every member of the order was a daughter of some one of the highest families of Germany or of Austria, the life at Hohenszalras, with its outdoor pastimes, its feudal habits, its vast liberties for man and beast, and its long frozen winters, when not a soul could come near it from over the passes, seemed very terrible to her. She could never understand her niece's passionate attachment to it, and she in real truth only breathed entirely at ease in those few weeks of the year which to please her niece she consented to pass away from the Hohe Tauern.

'Surely you will go to Ischl or go to Gödöllö this autumn, since her Majesty wishes it?' she said now, with an approving glance at the Imperial letter.

'Her Majesty is so kind as always to wish it,' answered the Countess Wanda. 'Let us leave time to show what it holds for us. This is scarcely summer. Yesterday was the fifteenth of May.'

'It is horribly cold,' said the Princess, drawing her silver-grey fur about her. 'It is always horribly cold here, even in mid-summer. And when it does not snow it rains; you cannot deny *that*.'

'Come, come! we have seen the sun all day to-day. I hope we shall see it many days, for they have begun planting-out, you see—the garden will soon be gorgeous.'

'When the mist allows it to be seen, it will be, I dare say,' said Princess Ottilie, somewhat pettishly. 'It is tolerable here in the summer, though never agreeable; but the Empress is so right, it is absurd to shut yourself longer up in this gloomy place; you are bound to return to the world. You owe it to your position to be seen in it once more.'

'The world does not want me, my dear aunt; nor do I want the world.'

'That is sheer perversity——'

'How am I perverse? I know the world very well, and I know that no one is necessary to it, unless it be Herr von Bismarck.'

'I do not see what Herr von Bismarck has to do with your going back to your natural manner of life,' said the Princess, severely, who abhorred any sort of levity in regard to the mighty minister who had destroyed the Lilienhöhe princes one fine morning, as indifferently as a boy plucks down a cranberry bough. 'In summer, or even autumn, Hohenszalras is endurable, but in winter it is—hyperborean—even you must grant that. One might as well be jammed in a ship, amidst icebergs, in the midst of a frozen sea.'

'And you were born on the Elbe, oh fie! But indeed, my dearest aunt, I like the frozen sea. The white months have no terrors for me. What you call, and what calls itself, the great world is far more narrow than the Iselthal. Here one's fancies, at least, can fly high as the eagles do; in the world who can rise out of the hot-house air of the salons, and see beyond the doings of one's friends and foes?'

'Surely one's own friends and foes—people like oneself, in a word—must be as interesting as Hans, and Peter, and Katte, and Grethel, with their crampons or their milkpails,' said the Princess, with impatience. 'Besides, surely in the world there are political movement, influence, interests.'

'Oh, intrigue?—as useful as Mdme. de Laballe's or Mdme. de Longueville's? No! I do not believe there is even that in our time, when even diplomacy itself is fast becoming a mere automatic factor in a world that is governed by newspapers, and which has changed the tyranny of wits for the tyranny of crowds. The time is gone by when a "Coterie of Countesses" could change ministries, if they ever did do so outside the novels of Disraeli. Drawing-room cabals may still do some mischief perhaps, but they can do no good. Sometimes, indeed, I think that what is called Government everywhere is nothing but a gigantic mischief-making and place-seeking. The State is everywhere too like a mother who sweeps her doorstep diligently, and scolds the neighbours, while her child scalds itself to death unseen within.'

'In the world,' interrupted the Princess oppositely, 'you

might persuade them that the sweeping of doorsteps is not sufficient——'

'I prefer to keep my own house in order. It is quite enough occupation,' said the Countess Wanda, with a smile. 'Dear aunt, here amongst my own folks I can do some real good, I have some tangible influence, I can feel that my life is not altogether spent in vain. Why should I exchange these simple and solid satisfactions for the frivolities and the inanities of a life of pleasure which would not even please me?'

'You are very hard to please, I know,' retorted the Princess. 'But say what you will, it becomes ridiculous for a person of your age, your great position, and your personal beauty, to immure yourself eternally in what is virtually no better than confinement to a fortress!'

'A court is more of a prison to me,' said Wanda von Szalras. 'I know both lives, and I prefer this life. As for my being very hard to please, I think I was very gay and mirthful before Bela's death. Since then all the earth has grown grey for me.'

'Forgive me, my beloved!' said Princess Ottilie, with quick contrition, whilst moisture sprang into her limpid and still luminous blue eyes.

Wanda von Szalras took the old abbess's hand in her own, and kissed it.

'I understand all you wish for me, dear aunt. Believe me, I envy people when I hear them laughing light-heartedly amongst each other. I think I shall never laugh *so* again.'

'If you would only marry——' said the Princess, with some hesitation.

'You think marriage amusing?' she said, with a certain contempt. 'If you do, it is only because you escaped it.'

'Amusing!' said the Princess, a little scandalised. 'I could speak of no Sacrament of our Holy Church as "amusing." You rarely display such levity of language. I confess I do not comprehend you. Marriage would give you interests in life which you seem to lack sadly now. It would restore you to the world. It would be a natural step to take with such vast possessions as yours.'

'It is not likely I shall ever take it,' said Wanda von Szalras, drawing the soft fine ear of Donau through her fingers.

'I know it is not likely. I am very sorry that it is not likely. Yet what nobler creature does God's earth contain than your cousin Egon?'

'Egon? No: he is a good and brave and loyal gentleman, none better; but I shall no more marry him than Donau here will wed a forest doe.'

'Yet he has loved you for ten years. But if not he there are so many others, men of high enough place to be above all suspicion

of mercenary motive. No woman has been more adored than you, Wanda. Look at Hugo Landrassy.'

'Oh, pray spare me their enumeration. It is like the Catalogue of Ships!' said the Countess Wanda, with some coldness and some impatience on her face.

At that moment an old man, who was major-domo of Hohenszalras, approached and begged with deference to know whether his ladies would be pleased to dine.

The Princess signified her readiness with alacrity; Wanda von Szalras signed assent with less willingness.

'What a disagreeable obligation dining is!' she said, as she turned reluctantly from the evening scene, with the lake sleeping in dusk and shadow, while the snow summits still shone like silver and glowed with rose.

'It is very wicked to think so,' said her great-aunt. 'When a merciful Creator has appointed our appetites for our consolation and support it is only an ingrate who is not thankful lawfully to indulge them.'

'That view of them never occurred to me,' said the châtelaine of Hohenszalras. 'I think you must have stolen it, aunt, from some abbé galant or some chanoinesse as lovely as yourself in the last century. Alas! if not to care to eat be ungrateful I am a sad ingrate. Donau and Neva are more ready subscribers to your creed.'

Donau and Neva were already racing towards the castle, and Wanda von Szalras, with one backward lingering glance to the sunset, which already was fading, followed them with slow steps to the grand house of which she was mistress.

In the north alone the sky was overcast and of a tawny colour, where the Pinzgau lay, with the green Salzach water rushing through its wooded gorges, and its tracks of sand and stone desolate as any desert.

That slender space of angry yellow to the north boded ill for the night. Bitter storms rolled in west from the Bœhmerwald, or north from the Salzkammergut, many a time in the summer weather, changing it to winter as they passed, tugging at the roof-ropes of the châlets, driving the sheep into their sennerin's huts, covering with mist and rain the mountain sides, and echoing in thunder from the peaks of the Untersburg to the snows of the Ortler Spitze. It was such a sudden storm which had taken Bela's life.

'I think we shall have wild weather,' said the Princess, drawing her furs around her, as she walked down the broad length of the stone terrace.

'I think so too,' said Wanda. 'It is coming very soon; and I fear I did a cruel thing this morning.'

'What was that?'

'I sent a stranger to find his way over our hills to Matrey, as

best he might. He will hardly have reached it by now, and if a storm should come——'

'A stranger?' said Princess Ottilie, whose curiosity was always alive, and had also lately no food for its hunger.

'Only a poacher; but he was a gentleman, which made his crime the worse.'

'A gentleman, and you sent him over the hills without a guide? It seems unlike the hospitality of Hohenszalras.'

'Why he would have shot a *kuttengeier*!'

'A *kuttengeier* is a horrible beast,' said the Princess, with a shudder; 'and a stranger, just for an hour or so, would be welcome.'

'Even if his name were not in the Hof-Kalender?' asked her niece, smiling.

'If he had been a pedlar, or a clockmaker, you would have sent him in to rest. For a gentlewoman, Wanda, and so proud a one as you are, you become curiously cruel to your own class.'

'I am always cruel to poachers. And to shoot a vulture in the month of May!'

CHAPTER II.

The dining-hall was a vast chamber, panelled and ceiled with oak. In the centre of the panels were emblazoned shields bearing the arms of the Szalras, and of the families with which they had intermarried; the long lancet windows had been painted by no less a hand than that of Jacob of Ulm; the knights' stalls which ran round the hall were the elaborate carving of Georges Syrlin; and old gorgeous banners dropped down above them, heavy with broideries and bullion.

There were upper servants in black clothes with knee breeches, and a dozen lacqueys in crimson and gold liveries, ranged about the table. In many ways there was a carelessness and ease in the household which always seemed lamentable to the Princess Ottilie, but in matters of etiquette the great household was ruled like a small court; and when sovereigns became guests there little in the order of the day needed change at Hohenszalras.

The castle was half fortress, half palace; a noble and solemn place, which had seen many centuries of warfare, of splendour, and of alternate war and joy. Strangers used to Paris gilding, to Italian sunlight, to English country-houses, found it too severe, too august, too dark, and too stern in its majesty, and were awed by it. But she who had loved it and played in it in infancy changed nothing there, but cherished it as it had come to her; and it was in all much the same as it had been in the days of Henry

the Lion, from its Gothic Silber-kapelle, that was like an ivory and jewelled casket set in dusky silver, to its immense Rittersaal, with a hundred knights in full armour standing down it, as the bronze figures stand round Maximilian's empty tomb in Tirol. There are many such noble places hidden away in the deep forests and the mountain glens of Maximilian's empire.

In this hall there were some fifteen persons standing. They were the priest, the doctor, the high steward, the almoner, some dames de compagnie, and some poor ladies, widows or spinsters, who subsisted on the charities of Hohenszalras. The two noble ladies bowed to them all and said a few kind words; then passed on and seated themselves at their own table, whilst these other persons took their seats noiselessly at a longer table, behind a low screen of carved oak.

The lords of Hohenszalras had always thus adhered to the old feudal habit of dining in public, and in royal fashion, thus.

The Countess Wanda and her aunt spoke little; the one was thinking of many other things than of the food brought to her, the other was enjoying to the uttermost each *bouchée*, each *relevée*, each morsel of quail, each mouthful of wine-stewed trout, each succulent truffle, and each rich drop of crown Tokaï.

The repast was long, and to one of them extremely tedious; but these formal and prolonged ceremonials had been the habit of her house, and Wanda von Szalras carefully observed all hereditary usage and custom. When her aunt had eaten her last fruit, and she herself had broken her last biscuit between the dogs, they rose, one glad that the most tiresome, and the other regretful that the most pleasant, hour of the uneventful day was over.

With a bow of farewell to the standing household, they went by mutual consent their divers ways; the Princess to her favourite blue room and her after-dinner doze, Wanda to her own study, the chamber most essentially her own, where all were hers.

The softness and radiance of the after-glow had given place to night and rain; the mists and the clouds had rolled up from the Zillerthal Alps, and the water was pouring from the skies.

Lamps, wax candles, flambeaux, burning in sconces or upheld by statues or swinging from chains, were illumining the darkness of the great castle, but in her own study only one little light was shining, for she, a daughter of the mystical mountains and forests, loved the shadows of the night.

She seated herself here by the unshuttered casement. The full moon was rising above the Glöckner range, and the rain-clouds as yet did not obscure it, though a film of falling water veiled all the westward shore of the lake, and all the snows on the peaks and crests of the Venediger. She leaned her elbows on the cushioned seat, and looked out into the night.

'Bela, my Bela! are you content with me?' she murmured. To her Bela was as living as though he were present by her side;

she lived in the constant belief of his companionship and his sight. Death was a cruel—ah, how cruel!—wall built up between him and her, forbidding them the touch of each other's hands, denying them the smile of each other's eyes; but none the less to her was he there, unseen, but ever near, hidden behind that inexorable, invisible barrier which one day would fall and let her pass and join him.

She sat idle in the embrasure of the oriel window, whilst the one lamp burned behind her. This, her favourite room, had scarcely been changed since Maria Theresa, on a visit there, had made it her bower-room. The window-panes had been painted by Selier of Landshut in 1440; the stove was one of Hirschvögel's; the wood-carvings had been done by Schuferstein; there was silver *repoussé* work of Kellerthaler, tapestries of Marc de Comans, enamels of Elbertus of Köln, of Jean of Limoges, of Leonard Limousin, of Penicaudius; embroidered stuffs of Isabeau Maire, damascened armour once worn by Henry the Lion, a painted spinet that had belonged to Isabella of Bavaria, and an ivory Book of Hours, once used by Carolus Magnus; and all these things, like the many other treasures of the castle, had been there for centuries; gifts from royal guests, spoils of foreign conquest, memorials of splendid embassies or offices of state held by the lords of Szalras, or marriage presents at magnificent nuptials in the old magnificent ages.

In this room she, their sole living representative, was never disturbed on any pretext. In the adjacent library (a great cedar-lined room, holding half a million volumes, with many missals and early classics, and many an *editio princeps* of the Renaissance), she held all her audiences, heard all petitions or complaints, audited her accounts, conversed with her tenants or her stewards, her lawyers or her peasants, and laboured earnestly to use to the best of her intelligence the power bequeathed to her.

'I am but God's and Bela's steward, as my steward is mine,' she said always to herself, and never avoided any duty or labour entailed on her, never allowed weariness or self-indulgence to enervate her. *Qui facit per alium, facit per se* had been early taught to her, and she never forgot it. She never did anything vicariously which concerned those dependent upon her. And she was an absolute sovereign in this her kingdom of glaciers and forests; her frozen sea as she had called it. She never avoided a duty merely because it was troublesome, and she never gave her signature without knowing why and wherefore. It is easy to be generous; to be just is more difficult and burdensome. Generous by temper, she strove earnestly to be always just as well, and her life was not without those fatigues which a very great fortune brings with it to any one who regards it as a sacred trust.

She had wide possessions and almost incalculable wealth. She had salt mines in Galicia, she had Vosläuer vineyards in the

Salzkammergut, she had vast plains of wheat, and leagues on leagues of green lands, where broods of horses bred and reared away in the steppes of Hungary. She had a palace in the Herrengasse at Vienna, another in the Residenzplatz of Salzburg; she had forests and farms in the Innthal and the Zillerthal; she had a beautiful little schloss on the green Ebensee, which had been the dower-house of the Countesses of Szalras, and she had pine-woods, quarries, vineyards, and even a whole riverain town on the Danube, with a right to take toll on the ferry there, which had been given to her forefathers as far back as the days of Mathias Carvin, a right that she herself had let drop into desuetude. 'I do not want the poor folks' copper kreutzer,' she said to her lawyers when they remonstrated. What did please her was the fact coupled with this right that even the Kaiser could not have entered her little town without his marshal thrice knocking at the gates, and receiving from the warder the permission to pass, in the words, 'The Counts of Idrac bid you come in peace.'

All these things and places made a vast source of revenue, and the property, whose title-deeds and archives lay in many a chest and coffer in the old city of Salzburg, was one of the largest in Europe. It would have given large portions and dowries to a score of sons and daughters and been none the worse. And it was all accumulating on the single head of one young and lonely woman! She was the last of her race; there were distant collateral branches, but none of them near enough to have any title to Hohenszalras. She could bequeath it where she would, and she had already willed it to her Kaiserin, in a document shut up in an iron chest in the city of Salzburg. She thought the Crown would be a surer and juster guardian of her place and people than any one person, whose caprices she could not foretell, whose extravagance or whose injustice she could not foresee. Sometimes, even to the spiritual mind of the Princess Ottilie, the persistent refusal of her niece to think of any marriage seemed almost a crime against mankind.

What did the Crown want with it?

The Princess was a woman of absolutely loyal sentiment towards all ancient sovereignties. She believed in Divine right, and was as strong a royalist as it is possible for any one to be whose fathers have been devoured like an anchovy by M. de Bismarck, and who has the sympathy of fellow feeling with Frohsdorf and Gmünden. But even her devotion to the rights of monarchs failed to induce her to see why the Habsburg should inherit Hohenszalras. The Crown is a noble heir, but it is one which leaves the heart cold. Who would ever care for her people, and her forests, and her animals as she had done? Even from her beloved Kaiserin she could not hope for that.

'If I had married?' she thought, the words of the Princess Ottilie coming back upon her memory.

Perhaps, for the sake of her people and her lands, it might have been better.

But there are women to whom the thought of physical surrender of themselves is fraught with repugnance and disgust; a sentiment so strong that only a great passion vanquishes it. She was one of these women, and passion she had never felt.

'Even for Hohenszalras I could not,' she thought, as she leaned on the embrasure cushions, and watched the moon, gradually covered with the heavy blue-black clouds. The Crown should be her heir and reign here after her, when she should be laid by the side of Bela in that beautiful dusky chapel beneath the shrines of ivory and silver, where all the dead of the House of Szalras slept. But it was an heir which left her heart cold.

She rose abruptly, left the embrasure, and began to examine the letters of the day and put down heads of replies to them, which her secretary could amplify on the morrow.

One letter her secretary could not answer for her; it was a letter which gave her pain, and which she read with an impatient sigh. It urged her return to the world as the letter of her Empress had done, and it urged with timidity, yet with passion, a love that had been loyal to her from her childhood. It was signed 'Egon Vàsàrhely.'

'It is the old story,' she thought. 'Poor Egon! If only one could have loved him, how it would have simplified everything! and I do love him, as I once loved Gela and Victor.'

But that was not the love which Egon Và-àrhely pleaded for with the tenderness of one who had been to her as a brother from her babyhood, and the frankness of a man who knew his own rank so high and his own fortunes so great, that no mercenary motive could be attributed to him even when he sought the mistress of Hohenszalras. It was the old story: she had heard it many times from him and from others in those brilliant winters in Vienna which had preceded Bela's death. And it had always failed to touch her. Women who have never loved are harsh to love from ignorance.

At that moment a louder crash of thunder reverberated from hill to hill, and the Glöckner domes seemed to shout to the crests of the Venediger.

'I hope that stranger is housed and safe,' she thought, her mind reverting to the poacher of whom she had spoken on the terrace at sunset. His face came before her memory: a beautiful face, Oriental in feature, northern in complexion, fair and cold, with blue eyes of singular brilliancy.

The forests of Hohenszalras are in themselves a principality. Under enormous trees, innumerable brooks and little torrents dash downwards to lose themselves in the green twilight of deep gorges; broad, dark, still lakes lie like cups of jade in the bosom of the woods; up above, where the Alpine firs and the pinus cembra

shelter him, the bear lives and the wolf too; and higher yet, where the glacier lies upon the mountain side, the merry steinbock leaps from peak to peak, and the white-throat vulture and the golden eagle nest. The oak, the larch, the beech, the lime, cover the lower hills, higher grow the pines and firs, the lovely drooping Siberian pine foremost amidst them. In the lower wood grassy roads cross and thread the leafy twilight. A stranger had been traversing these woods that morning, where he had no right or reason to be. Forest-law was sincerely observed and meted out at Hohenszalras, but of that he was ignorant or careless.

Before him, in the clear air, a large, dark object rose and spread huge pinions to the wind and soared aloft. The trespasser lifted his rifle to his shoulder, and in another moment would have fired. But an alpenstock struck the barrel up into the air, and the shot went off harmless towards the clouds. The great bird, startled by the report, flew rapidly to the westward; the Countess Wanda said quietly to the poacher in her forest, 'You cannot carry arms here.'

He looked at her angrily, and in surprise.

'You have lost me the only eagle I have seen for years,' he said bitterly, with a flush of discomfiture and powerless rage on his fair face.

She smiled a little.

'That bird was not an eagle, sir; it was a white-throated vulture, a *kuttengeier*. But had it been an eagle—or a sparrow—you could not have killed it on my lands.'

Pale still with anger, he uncovered his head.

'I have not the honour to know in whose presence I stand,' he muttered sullenly. 'But I have Imperial permission to shoot wherever I choose.'

'His Majesty has no more loyal subject than myself,' she answered him. 'But his dominion does not extend over my forests. You are on the ground of Hohenszalras, and your offence——'

'I know nothing of Hohenszalras!' he interrupted, with impatience.

She blew a whistle, and her head forester with three jägers sprang up as if out of the earth, some great wolf-hounds, grinning with their fangs, waiting but a word to spring. In one second the rangers had thrown themselves on the too audacious trespasser, had pinioned him, and had taken his rifle.

Confounded, disarmed, humiliated, and stunned by the suddenness of the attack, he stood mute and very pale.

'You know Hohenszalras now!' said the mistress of it, with a smile, as she watched his seizure, seated on a moss-grown boulder of granite, black Donau and white Neva by her side. He was pale with impotent fury, conscious of an indefensible and absurd position. The jägers looked at their mistress; they had slipped a cord over his wrists, and tied them behind his back; they looked to her

for a sign of assent to break his rifle. She stood silent, amused with her victory and his chastisement; a little derision shining in her lustrous eyes.

'You know Hohenszalras now!' she said once more. 'Men have been shot dead for what you were doing. If you be, indeed, a friend of my Emperor's, of course you are welcome here; but——'

'What right have you to offer me this indignity?' muttered the offender, his fair features changing from white to red, and red to white, in his humiliation and discomfiture.

'Right!' echoed the mistress of the forests. 'I have the right to do anything I please with you! You seem to me to understand but little of forest laws.'

'Madame, were you not a woman, you would have had bloodshed.'

'Oh, very likely. That sometimes happens, although seldom, as all the Hohe Tauern knows how strictly these forests are preserved. My men are looking to me for permission to break your rifle. That is the law, sir.'

'Since 'Forty-eight,' said the trespasser, with what seemed to her marvellous insolence, 'all the old forest laws are null and void. It is scarcely allowable to talk of trespass.'

A look of deep anger passed over her face. 'The follies of 'Forty-eight have nothing to do with Hohenszalras,' she said, very coldly. 'We hold under charters of our own, by grants and rights which even Rudolf of Habsburg never dared meddle with. I am not called on to explain this to you, but you appear to labour under such strange delusions that it is as well to dispel them.'

He stood silent, his eyes cast downward. His humiliation seemed to him enormously disproportioned to his offending. The hounds menaced him with deep growls and grinning fangs; the jägers held his gun; his wrists were tied behind him. 'Are you indeed a friend of the Kaiser?' she repeated to him.

'I am no friend of his,' he answered bitterly and sullenly. 'I met him a while ago zad-hunting on the Thorstein. His signature is in my pocket; bid your jäger take it out.'

'I will not doubt your word,' she said to him. 'You look a gentleman. If you will give me your promise to shoot no more on these lands I will let them set you free and render you up your rifle.'

'You have the law with you,' said the trespasser, moodily. 'Since I can do no less—I promise.'

'You are ungracious, sir,' said Wanda, with a touch of severity and irritation. 'That is neither wise nor grateful, since you are nothing more nor better than a poacher on my lands. Nevertheless, I will trust you.'

Then she gave a sign to the jägers and a touch to the hounds: the latter rose and ceased their growling; the former instantly,

though very sorrowfully, untied the cord off the wrists of their prisoner, and gave him back his unloaded rifle.

'Follow that path into the ravine: cross that; ascend the opposite hills, and you will find the high road. I advise you to take it, sir. Good-day to you.'

She pointed out the forest path which wound downward under the arolla pines. He hesitated a moment, then bowed very low with much grace, turned his back on her and her foresters and her dogs, and began slowly to descend the moss-grown slope.

He hated her for the indignity she had brought upon him, and the ridicule to which she forced him to submit; yet the beauty of her had startled and dazzled him. He had thought of the great Queen of the Nibelungen-Lied, whose armour lies in the museum of Vienna.

'Alas! why have you let him go, my Countess!' murmured Otto, the head forester.

'The Kaiser had made him sacred,' she answered, with a smile; and then she called Donau and Neva, who were roaming, and went on her way through her forest.

'What strange and cruel creatures we are!' she thought. 'The vulture would have dropped into the ravine. He would never have found it. The audacity, too, to fire on a *kuttengeier*; if it had been any lesser bird one might have pardoned it.'

For the eagle, the gypæte, the white-throated pygargue, the buzzard, and all the family of falcons were held sacred at Hohenszalras, and lived in their mountain haunts rarely troubled. It was an old law there that the great winged monarchs should never be chased, except by the Kaiser himself when he came there. So that the crime of the stranger had been more than trespass and almost treason! Her heart was hard to him, and she felt that she had been too lenient. Who could tell but that that rifle would bring down some free lord of the air?

She listened with the keen ear of one used to the solitude of the hills and woods; she thought he would shoot something out of bravado. But all was silent in that green defile beneath whose boughs the stranger was wending on his way. She listened long, but she heard no shots, although in those still heights the slightest noise echoed from a hundred walls of rock and ice. She walked onward through the deep shadow of the thick growing beeches; she had her alpenstock in her right hand, her little silver horn hung at her belt, and beside it was a pair of small ivory pistols, pretty as toys, but deadly as revolvers could be. She stooped here and there to gather some lilies of the valley, which were common enough in these damp grassy glades.

'Where could that stranger have come from, Otto?' she asked of her jäger.

'He must have come over the Hündspitz, my Countess,' said Otto. 'Any other way he would have been stopped by our men and lightened of his rifle.'

'The Hündspitz!' she echoed, in wonder, for the mountain so called was a wild inaccessible place, divided by a parapet of ice all the year round from the range of the Gross Glöckner.

'That must be,' said the huntsman, 'and for sure if an honest man had tried to come that way he would have been hurled headlong down the ice-wall——'

'He is the Kaiser's *protégé*, Otto,' said his mistress, with a smile, but the old jäger muttered that they had only his own word for that. It had pierced Otto's soul to let the poacher's rifle go.

She thought of all this with some compunction now, as she sat in her own warm safe chamber and heard the thunder, the wind, the raising of the storm which had now fairly broken in full fury. She felt uneasy for the erring stranger. The roads over the passes were still perilous from avalanches and half melted snow in the crevasses; the time of year was more dangerous than midwinter.

'I ought to have given him a guide,' she thought, and went out and joined the Princess Ottilie, who had awakened from her after-dinner repose under the loud roll of the thunder and the constantly recurring flashes of lightning.

'I am troubled for that traveller whom I saw in the woods today,' she said to her aunt. 'I trust he is safe housed.'

'If he had been a pastry-cook from the Engadine, or a seditious heretical *colporteur* from Geneva, you would have sent him into the kitchens to feast,' said the Princess, contentiously.

'I hope he is safe housed,' repeated Wanda. 'It is several hours ago; he may very well have reached the posthouse.'

'You have the satisfaction of thinking the *kuttengeier* is safe, sitting on some rock tearing a fish to pieces,' said the Princess, who was irritable because she was awakened before her time. 'Will you have some coffee or some tea? You look disturbed, my dear; after all, you say the man was a poacher.'

'Yes. But I ought to have seen him safe off my ground. There are a hundred kinds of death on the hills for any one who does not know them well. Let us look at the weather from the hall; one can see better from there.'

From the Rittersäal, whose windows looked straight down the seven miles of the lake water, she watched the tempest. All the mountains were sending back echoes of thunder, which sounded like salvoes of artillery. There was little to be seen for the dense rain mist; the beacon of the Holy Isle glimmered redly through the darkness. In the upper air snow was falling; the great white peaks and pinnacles ever and again flashed strangely into view as the lightning illumined them; the Glöcknerwanda towered above all others a moment in the glare, and seemed like ice and fire mingled.

'They are like the great white thrones of the Apocalypse,' she thought.

Beneath, the lake boiled and seethed in blackness like a witches' cauldron.

A storm was always terrible to her, from the memory of Bela.

In the lull of a second in the tempest of sound it seemed to her as if she heard some other cry than that of the wind.

'Open one of these windows and listen,' she said to Hubert, her major-domo. 'I fancy I hear a shout—a scream. I am not certain, but listen well.'

'There is some sound,' said Hubert, after a moment of attention. 'It comes from the lake. But no boat could live long in that water, my Countess.'

'No!' she said, with a quick sigh, remembering how her brother had died. 'But we must do what we can. It may be one of the lake fishermen caught in the storm before he could make for home. Ring the alarm-bell, and go out, all of you, to the water stairs. I will come, too.'

In a few moments the deep bell that hung in the chime tower, and which was never sounded except for death or danger, added its sonorous brazen voice to the clang and clamour of the storm. All the household paused, and at the summons, coming from north, south, east, and west of the great pile of buildings, grooms, gardeners, huntsmen, pages, scullions, underlings, all answered to the metal tongue, which told them of some peril at Hohenszalras.

With a hooded cloak thrown over her, she went out into the driving rain, down the terrace to the head of what were called the water stairs; a flight of granite steps leading to the little quay upon the eastward shore of the Szaka-see, where were moored in fair weather the pleasure boats, the fishing punts, and the canoes which belonged to the castle: craft all now safe in the boat-house.

'Make no confusion,' she said to them. 'There is no danger in the castle. There is some boat, or some swimmer, on the lake. Light the terrace beacon and we shall see.'

She was very pale. There was no storm on those waters that did not bring back to her, as poignant as the first fresh hours of its grief, the death of Bela.

The huge beacon of iron, a cage set on high and filled with tow and tar and all inflammable things, was set on fire, and soon threw a scarlet glare over the scene.

The shouts had ceased.

'They may be drowned,' she said, with her lips pressed tightly together. 'I hear nothing now. Have you the rope and the life-boat ready? We must wait for more light.'

At that moment the whole of the tar caught, and the beacon blazed at its fiercest in its iron cage, as it had used to blaze in the ages gone by as a war signal, when the Prelates of Salzburg and Birchtesgaden were marching across the marshes of Pinzgau in

quarrel or feud with the lords of the strongest fortress in the Hohe Tauern.

In the struggling light which met the blue glance of the lightning they could see the angry waters of the lake as far as the Holy Isle, and near to land, only his head above the water, was a man drowning, as the pilgrims had drowned.

'For the love of God—the rope!' she cried, and almost before the words had escaped from her her men had thrown a life-buoy to the exhausted swimmer, and pushed one of the boats into the seething darkness of the lake. But the swimmer had strength enough to catch hold of the buoy as it was hurled to him by the *fischermeister's* unerring hand, and he clung to it and kept his grasp on it, despite the raging of the wind and waters, until the boat reached him. He was fifty yards off the shore, and he was pulled into the little vessel, which was tossed to and fro upon the black waters like a shell; the *fohn* was blowing fiercely all the time, and flung the men headlong on the boat's bottom twice ere they could seize the swimmer, who helped himself, for, though mute and almost breathless, he was not insensible, and had not lost all his strength. If he had not been so near the land he and the boat's crew would all have sunk, and dead bodies would once more have been washed on the shore of the Szalrassee with the dawn of another day.

Drenched, choked with water, and thrown from side to side as the wind played with them as a child with its ball, the men ran their boat at last against the stairs, and landed with their prize.

Dripping from head to foot, and drawing deep breaths of exhaustion, the rescued man stood on the terrace steps bare-headed and in his shirt-sleeves, his brown velvet breeches pulled up to his knees, his fair hair lifted by the wind, and soaked with wet.

She recognised the trespasser of the forest.

'Madame, behold me in your power again!' he said, with a little smile, though he breathed with labour, and his voice was breathless and low.

'You are welcome, sir. Any stranger or friend would be welcome in such a night,' she said, with the red glow of the beacon light shed upon her. 'Pray do not waste breath or time in courtesies. Come up the steps and hurry to the house. You must be faint and bruised.'

'No, no,' said the swimmer; but as he spoke his eyes closed, he staggered a little; a deadly faintness and cold had seized him, and cramp came on all his limbs.

The men caught him, and carried him up the stairs; he strove to struggle and protest, but Otto the forester stooped over him.

'Keep you still,' he muttered. 'You hear the Countess's orders. Trespass has cost you dear, my master.'

'I do not think he is greatly hurt,' said the mistress of Szaravola to her house physician. 'But go you to him, doctor, and see that he is warmly housed and has hot drinks. Put him in the Strangers' Gallery, and pray take care my aunt is not alarmed.'

The Princess Ottilie at that moment was alternately eating a *nougat* out of her sweetmeat box and telling the beads of her rosary. The sound of the wind and the noise of the storm could not reach her in her favourite blue-room, all *capitonnée* with turquoise silks as it was; the only chamber in all Szaravola that was entirely modern and French.

'I do hope Wanda is running no risk,' she thought from time to time. 'It would be quite like her to row down the lake.'

But she sat still in her lamp light, and told her beads.

A few moments later her niece entered. Her waterproof mantle had kept her white gown from the rain and spray.

There was a little moisture on her hair, that was all. She did not look as if she had stirred farther from her drawing-room than the Princess had done.

Now that the stranger was safe and sound he had ceased to have any interest for her; he was nothing more than any flotsam of the lake; only one other to sleep beneath the roofs of Hohenszalras, where half a hundred slept already.

The castle, in the wild winters that shut out the Hohe Tauern from the world, was oftentimes a hospice for travellers, though usually those travellers were only pedlars, colporteurs, mule-drivers, clock-makers of the Zillerthal or carpet weavers of the Defreggerthal, too late in the year to pursue their customary passage over the passes in safety. To such the great beacon of the Holy Isle and the huge servants' hall of Szaravola were well known.

She sat down to her embroidery frame without speaking; she was working some mountain flowers in silks on velvet, for a friend in Paris. The flowers stood in a glass on a table.

'It is unkind of you to go out in that mad way on such a night as this, and return looking so unlike having had an adventure!' said the Princess, a little pettishly.

'There has been no adventure,' said Wanda von Szalras, with a smile. 'But there is what may do as well—a handsome stranger who has been saved from drowning.'

Even as she spoke her face changed, her mouth quivered; she crossed herself, and murmured, too low for the other to hear:

'Bela, my beloved, think not that I forget!'

The Princess Ottilie sat up erect in her chair, and her blue eyes brightened like a girl of sixteen.

'Then there *is* an adventure! Tell it me quick! My dear, silence is very stately and very becoming to you; but sometimes—excuse me—you do push it to annoying extremes.'

'I was afraid of agitation for you,' said the Countess Wanda; and then she told the Princess what had occurred that night.

'And I never knew that a poor soul was in peril!' cried the Princess, conscience-stricken. 'And is that the last you have seen of him? Have you never asked——?'

'Hubert says he is only bruised; they have taken him to the Strangers' Gallery. Here is Herr Greswold—he will tell us more.'

The person who entered was the physician of Hohenszalras. He was a little old man of great talent, with a clever, humorous, mild countenance; he had, coupled with a love for rural life, a passion for botany and natural history, which made his immurement in the Iselthal welcome to him, and the many fancied ailments of the Princess endurable. He bowed very low alternately to both ladies, and refused with a protest the chair to which the Countess Wanda motioned him. He said that the stranger was not in the least seriously injured; he had been seized with cramp and chills, but he had administered a cordial, and these were passing. The gentleman seemed indisposed to speak, shivered a good deal, and was inclined to sleep.

'He is a gentleman, think you?' asked the Princess.

The Herr Professor said that to him it appeared so.

'And of what rank?'

The physician thought it was impossible to say.

'It is always possible,' said the Princess, a little impatiently. 'Is his linen fine? Is his skin smooth? Are his hands white and slender? Are his wrists and ankles small?'

Herr Greswold said that he was sorely grieved, but he had not taken any notice as to any of these things; he had been occupied with his diagnosis of the patient's state; for, he added, he thought the swimmer had been long in the water, and the Szalrassee was of very dangerously low temperature at night, being fed as it was from the glaciers and snows of the mountains.

'It is very interesting,' said the Princess; 'but pray observe what I have named, now that you return to his chamber.'

Greswold took the hint, and bowed himself out of the drawing-room. Frau Ottilie returned to her nougats.

'I wish that one could know who he was,' she said, regretfully. To harbour an unknown person was not agreeable to her in these days of democracies and dynamite.

'What does it matter?' said her niece. 'Though he were a Nihilist or a convict from the mines, he would have to be sheltered to-night.'

'The Herr Professor is very inattentive,' said the Princess, with an accent that from one of her sweetness was almost severe.

'The Herr Professor is compiling the Flora of the Hohe Tauern,' said her niece, 'and he will publish it in Leipzig some time in the next twenty years. How can a botanist care for so unlovely a creature as a man? If it were a flower indeed!'

'I never approved of that herbarian,' said the Princess, still severely. 'It is too insignificant an occupation beside those great questions of human ills which his services are retained to study. He is inattentive, and he grows even impertinent: he almost told me yesterday that my neuralgia was all imagination!'

'He took you for a flower, mother mine, because you are so lovely; and so he thought you could have no mortal pain!' said Wanda, tenderly.

Then after a pause she added:

'Dear aunt, come with me. I have asked Father Ferdinand to have a mass to-night for Bela. I fancy Bela is glad that no other life has been taken by the lake.'

The Princess rose quickly and kissed her.

In the Strangers' Gallery, in a great chamber of panelled oak and Flemish tapestries, the poacher, as he lay almost asleep on a grand old bed, with yellow taffeta hangings, and the crown of the Szalras Counts in gilded bronze above its head, he heard as if in his dream the sound of chanting voices and the deep slow melodies of an organ.

He stirred and opened his drowsy eyes.

'Am I in heaven?' he asked feebly. Yet he was a man who, when he was awake and well, believed not in heaven.

The physician, sitting by his bedside, laid his hand upon his wrist. The pulse was beating strongly but quickly.

'You are in the Burg of Hohenszalras,' he answered him. 'The music you hear comes from the chapel; there is a midnight mass. A mass of thanksgiving for you.'

The heavy lids fell over the eyes of the weary man, and the dreamy sense of warmth and peace that was upon him lulled him into the indifference of slumber.

CHAPTER III.

With the morning, though the storm had ceased and passed away, the clouds were dark, the mountains were obscured, and the rain was pouring down upon lake and land.

It was still early in the day when the stranger was aroused to the full sense of awaking in a room unknown to him; he had slept all through the night; he was refreshed and without fever. His left arm was strained, and he had many bruises; otherwise he was conscious of no hurt.

'Twice in that woman's power,' he thought, with anger, as he looked round the great tapestried chamber that sheltered him, and tried to disentangle his actual memories of the past night from the dreams that had haunted him of the Nibelungen Queen, who all night long he had seen in her golden armour, with her eyes which,

like those of the Greek nymph, dazzled those on whom they gazed to madness. Dream and fact had so interwoven themselves that it was with an effort he could sever the two, awaking as he did now in an unfamiliar chamber, and surrounded with those tapestries whose colossal figures seemed the phantoms of a spirit world.

He was a man in whom some vein of superstition had outlived the cold reason and the cynical mockeries of the worldly experiences and opinions in which he was steeped. A shudder of cold ran through his blood as he opened his eyes upon that dim, tranquil, and vast apartment, with the stories of the Tannhäuser legend embroidered on the walls.

'I am he! I am he!' he thought incoherently, watching the form of the doomed knight speeding through the gloom and snow.

'How does the most high and honourable gentleman feel himself this morning?' asked of him, in German, a tall white-haired woman, who might have stepped down from an old panel of Metzu.

The simple commonplace question roused him from the mists of his fancies and fears, and realised to him the bare fact that he was a guest, unbidden, in the walls of Szaravola.

The physician also drew near his bed to question him; and a boy brought on a tray Rhine wine and Tokayer Ausbruck, coffee and chocolate, bread and eggs.

He broke his fast with a will, for he had eaten nothing since the day before at noon; and the Professor Greswold congratulated him on his good night's rest, and on his happy escape from the Szalrassee.

Then he himself said, with a little confusion:

'I saw a lady last night?'

'Certainly, you saw our lady,' said Greswold, with a smile.

'What do you call her?' he asked eagerly.

The physician answered:

'She is the Countess Wanda von Szalras. She is sole mistress here. But for her, my dear sir, I fear me you would be now lying in those unfathomed depths that the bravest of us fear.'

The stranger shuddered a little.

'I was a madman to try the lake with such an overcast sky; but I had missed my road, and I was told that it lay on the other side of the water. Some peasants tried to dissuade me from crossing, but I am a good rower and swimmer too; so I set forth to pull myself over your lake.'

'With a sky black as ink! I suppose you are used to more serene summers. Midsummer is not so different to midwinter here that you can trust to its tender mercies.'

The stranger was silent.

'She took my gun from me in the morning,' he said abruptly. The memory of the indignity rankled in him, and made bitter the bread and wine.

The physician laughed.

'Were you poaching? Oh, that is almost a hanging matter in the Hohenszalras woods. Had you met Otto without our lady he would most likely have shot you without warning.'

'Are you savages in the Tauern?'

'Oh no; but we are very feudal still, and our forest laws have escaped alteration in this especial part of the province.'

'She has been very hospitable to me, since my crime was so great.'

'She is the soul of hospitality, and the Schloss is a hospice,' said the physician. 'When there is no town nearer than ten Austrian miles, and the nearest posting-house is at Windisch-Matrey, it is very necessary to exercise the primitive virtues; it is our compensation for our feudalism. But take some tokayer, my dear sir; you are weaker than you know. You have had a bath of ice; you had best lie still, and I will send you some journals and books.'

'I would rather get up and go away,' said the stranger. 'These bruises are nothing. I will thank your lady, as you call her, and then go on my way as quickly as I may.'

'I see you do not understand feudal ways, though you have suffered from them,' said the doctor. 'You shall get up if you wish; but I am certain my lady will not let you leave here to-day. The rains are falling in torrents; the roads are dangerous; a bridge has broken down over the Burgenbach, which you must cross to get away. In a word, if you insist on departure, they will harness their best horses for you, for all the antique virtues have refuge here, and amongst them is a grand hospitality; but you will possibly kill the horses, and perhaps the postillions, and you will not even then get very far upon your way. Be persuaded by me. Wait at least until the morning dawns.'

'I had better burden your lady with an unbidden guest than kill her horses, certainly,' said the stranger. 'How is she sole mistress here? Is there a Count von Szalras? Is she a widow?'

'She has never married,' answered Greswold; and gave his patient a brief sketch of the tragic fates of the lords of Hohenszalras, amongst whom death had been so busy.'

'A very happy woman to be so rich and so free!' said the traveller, with a little impatient envy; and he added, 'She is very handsome also; indeed, beautiful. I now remember to have heard of her in Paris. Her hand has been esteemed one of the great prizes of Europe.'

'I think she will never marry,' said the old man.

'Oh, my dear doctor, who can make such a prophecy for any woman who is still young—at least she looks young. What age may she be?

'She was twenty-four years of age on Easter Day. As for

happiness, when you know the Countess Wanda, you will know that she would go out as poor as S. Elizabeth, and self-dethroned like her, most willingly, could she by such a sacrifice see her brothers living around her.'

The stranger gave a little cynical laugh of utter incredulity, which dismayed and annoyed the old professor.

'You do not know her,' he said angrily.

'I know humanity,' said the other. 'Will you kindly take all my apologies and regrets to the Countess, and give her my name; the Marquis de Sabran. She can satisfy herself as to my identity at any embassy she may care to consult.'

When he said his name, the professor gave a great cry and started from his seat.

'Sabran!' he echoed. 'You edited the "Mexico"!' he exclaimed, and gazed over his spectacles in awe and sympathy commingled at the stranger, who smiled and answered:

'Long ago, yes. Have you heard of it?'

'Heard of it!' echoed Greswold. 'Do you take us for barbarians, sir? It is here, both in my small library, which is the collection of a specialist, and in the great library of the castle, which contains a million of volumes.'

'I am twice honoured,' said the stranger, with a smile of some irony. The good professor was a little disconcerted, and his enthusiasm was damped and cooled. He felt as much embarrassment as though he had been the owner of a discredited work.

'May I not be permitted to congratulate you, sir?' he said, timidly. 'To have produced that great work is to possess a title to the gratitude and esteem of all educated men.'

'You are very good,' said Sabran, somewhat indifferently; 'but all that is great in that book is the Marquis Xavier's. I am but the mere compiler.'

'The compilation, the editing of it, required no less learning than the original writer displayed, and that was immense,' said the physician, and with all the enthusiasm of a specialist he plunged into discussion of the many notable points of a mighty intellectual labour, which had received the praise of all the cultured world.

Sabran listened courteously, but with visible weariness. 'You are very good,' he said at last. 'But you will forgive me if I say that I have heard so much of the "Mexico" that I am tempted to wish I had never produced it. I did so as a duty; it was all I could do in honour of one to whom I owed far more than mere life itself.'

Greswold bowed and said no more.

'Give me my belt,' said the stranger to the man who waited on him; it was a leathern belt, which had been about his loins; it was made to hold gold and notes, a small six-chambered revolver, and a watch; these were all in it, and with his money was the

Imperial permission to shoot, which had been given him by Franz Josef the previous autumn on the Thorstein.

'Your Countess will doubtless recognise her Emperor's signature,' he said, as he gave the paper to the physician. 'It will serve at least as a passport, if not as a letter of presentation.'

Réné, Marquis de Sabran-Romaris, was one of those persons who illustrate the old fairy tale, of all the good gifts at birth being marred by the malison of one godmother. He had great physical beauty, personal charm, and facile talent; but his very facility was his bane. He did all things so easily and well, that he had never acquired the sterner quality of application. He was a brilliant and even profound scholar, an accomplished musician, a consummate critic of art; and was endowed, moreover, with great natural tact, taste, and correct intuition.

Being, as he was, a poor man, these gifts should have made him an eminent one or a wealthy one, but the perverse fairy who had cursed when the other had blessed him, had contrived to make all these graces and talents barren. Whether it be true or not that the world knows nothing of its greatest men, it is quite true that its cleverest men very often do nothing of importance all their lives long. He did nothing except acquire a distinct repute as a *dilettante* in Paris, and a renown in the clubs of being always serene and fortunate at play.

He had sworn to himself when he had been a youth to make his career worthy of his name; but the years had slipped away, and he had done nothing. He was a very clever man, and he had once set a high if a cold and selfish aim before him as his goal. But he had done worse even than fail; he had never even tried to reach it.

He was only a *boulevardier*; popular and admired amongst men for his ready wit and his cool courage, and by women often adored and often hated, and sometimes, by himself, thoroughly despised: never so much despised as when by simple luck at play or on the Bourse he made the money which slid through his fingers with rapidity.

All he had in the world were the wind-torn oaks and the sea-washed rocks of a bleak and lonely Breton village, and a few hundred thousand francs' worth of pictures, porcelains, arms, and *bibelots*, which had accumulated in his rooms on the Boulevard Haussmann, bought at the Drouot in the forenoons after successful play at night. Only two things in him were unlike the men whose associate he was: he was as temperate as an Arab, seldom even touching wine; and he was a keen mountaineer and athlete, once off the asphalte of the Boulevards. For the rest, popular though he was in the society he frequented, no living man could boast of any real intimacy with him. He had a thousand acquaintances, but he accepted no friend. Under the grace and suavity of a very courtly manner he wore the armour of a great reserve.

'At heart you have the taciturnity and the *sauvagerie* of the Armorican beneath all your polished suavity,' said a woman of his world to him once; and he did not contradict her.

Men did not quarrel with him for it: he was a fine swordsman and a dead shot: and women were allured all the more surely to him because they felt that they never really entered his life or took any strong hold on it.

Such as he was he lay now half-awake on the great bed under its amber canopy, and gazed dreamily at the colossal figures of the storied tapestry, where the Tuscan idlers of the Decamerone wore the sombre hues and the stiff and stately garb of the Flemish fashion of the sixteenth century.

'I wonder why I tried so hard to live last night! I am not in love with life,' he thought to himself, as he slowly remembered all that had happened, and recalled the face of the lady who had leaned down to him from over the stone parapet in the play of the torchlight and lightnings. And yet life seemed good and worth having as he recalled that boiling dusky swirl of water which had so nearly swallowed him up in its anger.

He was young enough to enjoy; he was blessed with a fine constitution and admirable health, which even his own excesses had not impaired; he had no close ties to the world, but he had a frequent enjoyment of it, which made it welcome to him. The recovery of existence always enhances its savour; and as he lay dreamily recalling the sharp peril he had run, he was simply and honestly glad to be amongst living men.

He remained still when the physician had left and looked around him; in the wide hearth a fire of oak logs was burning; rain was beating against the painted panes of the oriel casements; there was old oak, old silver, old ivory in the furniture of the chamber, and the tapestries were sombre and gorgeous. It was a room of the sixteenth century; but the wine was in jugs of Bacarat glass, and a box of Turkish cigarettes stood beside them, with the Paris and Vienna newspapers. Everything had been thought of that could contribute to his comfort: he wondered if the doctor had thought of all this, or if it was due to the lady. 'It is a magnificent hospice,' he said to himself with a smile, and then he angrily remembered his rifle, his good English rifle, that was now sunk for ever with his little boat in the waters of the Szalrassee. 'Why did she offer me that outrage?' he said to himself: it went hard with him to lie under her roof, to touch her wine and bread. Yet he was aching in every limb, the bed was easy and spacious, the warmth and the silence and the aromatic scent of the burning pine-cones were alluring him to rest; he dropped off to sleep again, the same calm sleep of fatigue that had changed into repose, and nothing woke him till the forenoon was passed.

'Good heavens! how I am trespassing on this woman's

hospitality!' he thought as he did awake, angry with himself for having been lulled into this oblivion; and he began to rise at once, though he felt his limbs stiff and his head for the moment light.

'Cannot I get a carriage for S. Johann? My servant is waiting for me there,' he said to the youth attending on him, when his bath was over.

The lad smiled with amusement.

'There are no carriages here but our lady's, and she will not let you stir this afternoon, my lord,' he answered in German, as he aided the stranger to put on his own linen and shooting breeches, now dry and smoothed out by careful hands.

'But I have no coat!' said the traveller in discomfiture, remembering that his coat was gone with his rifle and his powder-flask.

'The Herr Professor thought you could perhaps manage with one of these. They were all of Count Gela's, who was a tall man and about your make,' said an older man-servant who had entered, and now showed him several unworn or scarcely worn suits.

'If you could wear one of these, my lord, for this evening, we will send as soon as it is possible for your servant and your clothes to S. Johann; but it is impossible to-day, because a bridge is down over the Burgenbach.'

'You are all of you too good,' said Sabran, as he essayed a coat of black velvet.

Full of his new acquaintance and all his talents, the good man Greswold had hurried away to obey the summons of his ladies, who had desired to see him. He found them in the white room, a grand salon hung with white satin silver-fringed, and stately with white marble friezes and columns, whence it took its name. It was a favourite room with the mistress of the Schloss: at either end of it immense windows, emblazoned and deeply embayed, looked out over the sublime landscape without, of which at this moment every outline was shrouded in the grey veil of an incessantly falling rain.

With humble obeisances Greswold presented the message and the credentials of her guest to Wanda von Szalras; it was the first occasion that he had had of doing so. She read the document signed by the Kaiser with a smile.

'This is the paper which this unhappy gentleman spoke of when I arrested him as a poacher,' she said to her aunt. 'The Marquis de Sabran. The name is familiar to me: I have heard it before.'

'Surely you do not forget the Pontêves-Bargême, the Ducs de Sabran?' said the Princess, with some severity. 'S. Eleazar was a Comte de Sabran!'

'I know! But it is of something nearer to us than S.

Eleazar that I am thinking; there was surely some work or another which bore that name, and was much read and quoted.'

'He edited and annotated the great "Mexico,"' said Herr Greswold, as though all were told in that.

'A *savant*?' murmured the Princess, in some contemptuous chagrin. 'Pray what is the "Mexico"?'

'The grandest archæological and botanical work, the work of the finest research and most varied learning that has been produced out of Germany,' commenced the Professor, with eagerness, but the Princess arrested him midway in his eloquence.

'The French are all infidels, we know that; but one might have hoped that in one of the old nobility, as his name would imply, some lingering reverence for tradition remained.'

'It is not a subversive, not a philosophic work,' said the Professor, eagerly; but she silenced him.

'It is a book! Why should a Marquis de Sabran write a book?' said the Princess, with ineffable disdain.

There were all the Fathers for any one who wanted to read: what need for any other use of printer's type? So she was accustomed to think and to say when, scandalised, she saw the German, French, and English volumes, of which whole cases were wont to arrive at Hohenszalras for the use of Wanda von Szalras alone: works of philosophy and of science amongst them which had been denounced in the 'Index.'

'Dear mother,' said the Countess Wanda, 'I have read the "Mexico:" it is a grand monument raised to a dead man's memory out of his own labours by one of his own descendants—his only descendant, if I remember aright.'

'Indeed,' said the Princess, unconvinced. 'I know those scientific works by repute; they always consider the voyage of a germ of moss, carried on an aerolite through an indefinite space for a billion of ages, a matter much easier of credence than the "Life of St. Jerome." I believe they call it sporadic transmission; they call typhus fever the same.'

'There is nothing of that in the "Mexico:" it is a very fine work on the archæology and history of the country, and on its flora.'

'I should have supposed a Marquis de Sabran a gentleman,' said the Princess, whom no precedent from the many monarchs who have been guilty of inferior literature could convince that literature was other than a trade much like shoemaking: at its best a sort of clerk's quill-driving, to be equally pitied and censured.

Here Greswold, who valued his post and knew his place too well to defend either literature or sporadic germs, timidly ventured to suggest that the Marquis might be well known amongst the nobility of western France, although not of that immense distinction which finds its chronicle in the Hof-Kalender. The Princess smiled.

'*Petite noblesse.* You mean petite noblesse, my good Greswold? But even the petite noblesse need not write books?'

When, however, the further question arose of inviting the stranger to come to their dinner-table, it was the haughtier Princess who advocated the invitation; the mistress of the house demurred. She thought that all requirements of courtesy and hospitality would be fulfilled by allowing him to dine in his own apartments.

'We do not know him,' she urged. 'No doubt he may very well be what he says, but it is not easy to refer to an embassy while the rains are making an island of the Tauern! Nay, dear mother, I am not suspicious; but I think, as we are two women alone, we can fulfil all obligations of hospitality towards this gentleman without making him personally acquainted with ourselves.'

'That is really very absurd. It is acting as if Hohenszalras were a *gasthof*,' said the Princess, with petulance. 'It is not so often that we have any relief to the tedium with which you are pleased to surround yourself that we should be required to shut ourselves from any chance break in it. Of course, if you send this person his dinner to his own rooms, he will feel hurt, mortified; he will go away, probably on foot, rather than remain where he is insulted. Breton nobility is not very eminent, but it is very proud; it is provincial, territorial; but every one knows it is ancient, and usually of the most loyal traditions alike to Church and State. I should be the last person to advocate making a friendship, or even an acquaintance, without the fullest inquiry; but when it is a mere question of politeness for twenty-four hours, which can entail no consequences, then I must confess that I think prejudices should yield before the obligations of courtesy. But of course, my love, decide as you will: you are mistress.'

The Countess Wanda smiled, and did not press her own opposition. She perceived that the mind of her aunt was full of vivid and harmless curiosity.

In the end she suggested that the Princess should represent her, and receive the foreign visitor with all due form and ceremony; but she herself was still indisposed to admit a person of whose antecedents she had no positive guarantee so suddenly and entirely into her intimacy.

'You are extraordinarily suspicious,' said the elder lady, pettishly. 'If he were a pedlar or a colporteur, you would be willing to talk with him.'

'Pedlars and colporteurs cannot take any social advantage of one's conversation afterwards,' replied her niece. 'We are not usually invaded by men of rank here; so the precedent may not be perilous. Have your own way, mother mine.'

The Princess demurred, but finally accepted the compromise, reflecting that if this stranger were to dine alone with her she

would be able to ascertain much more about him than if Wanda, who had been created void of all natural curiosity, and who would have been capable of living with people twelve months without asking them a single question, would render it possible to do were she present.

Meanwhile, the physician hurried back to his new friend, who had a great and peculiar interest for him as the editor of the 'Mexico,' and offered him, with the permission of the Countess von Szalras, to wile away the chill and gloomy day by an inspection of the Schloss.

Joachim Greswold was a very learned and shrewd man, whom poverty and love of tranquil opportunities of study had induced to bury himself in the heart of the Glöckner mountains. He had already led a long, severe, and blameless life of deep devotion and hard privation, when the post of private physician at Hohenszalras in general, and to the Princess Ottilie in especial, had been procured for him by the interest of Prince Lilienhöhe. He had had many sorrows, trials, and disappointments, which made the simple routine and the entire solitude of his existence here welcome to him. But he was none the less delighted to meet any companion of culture and intelligence to converse with, and in his monotonous and lonely life it was a rare treat to be able to exchange ideas with one fresh from the intellectual movements of the outer world.

The Professor found, not to his surprise since he had read the 'Mexico,' that his elegant *grand seigneur* knew very nearly as much as he did of botany and of comparative anatomy; that he had travelled nearly all over the world, and travelled to much purpose, and knew many curious things of the flora of the Rio Grande, whilst it appeared that he possessed in his cabinets in Paris a certain variety of orchid that the doctor had always longed to obtain. He was entirely won over when Sabran, to whom the dried flower was very indifferent, promised to send it to him. The French Marquis had not Greswold's absolute love of science; he had studied everything that had come to his hand, because he had a high intelligence, and an insatiable appetite for knowledge; and he had no other kind of devotion to it; when he had penetrated its mysteries, it lost all interest for him.

At any rate he knew enough to make him an enchanting companion to a learned man who was all alone in his learning, and received little sympathy in it from any one near him.

'What a grand house to be shut up in the heart of the mountains!' said Sabran, with a sigh. 'I do believe what romance there still is in the world does lie in these forests of Austria, which have all the twilight and the solitude that would suit Merlin or the Sleeping Beauty better than anything we have in France, except, indeed, here and there an old château like Chenonceaux, or Maintenon.'

'The world has not spoilt us as yet,' said the doctor. 'We see few strangers. Our people are full of old faiths, old loyalties, old traditions. They are a sturdy and yet tender people. They are as fearless as their own steinbok, and they are as reverent as saints were in monastic days. Our mountains are as grand as the Swiss ones, but, thank Heaven, they are unspoilt and little known. I tremble when I think they have begun to climb the Gross Glöckner; all the mystery and glory of our glaciers will vanish when they become mere points of ascension. The alpenstock of the tourist is to the everlasting hills what railway metals are to the plains. Thank God! the few railroads we have are hundreds of miles asunder.'

'You are a reactionist, doctor?'

'I am an old man, and I have learned the value of repose,' said Greswold. 'You know we are called a slow race. It is only the unwise amongst us who have quicksilver in their brains and toes.'

'You have gold in the former, at least,' said Sabran, kindly, 'and I dare say quicksilver is in your feet, too, when there is a charity to be done?'

Herr Joachim, who was simple in the knowledge of mankind, though shrewd in mother-wit, coloured a little with pleasure. How well this stranger understood him!

The day went away imperceptibly and agreeably to the physician and to the stranger in this pleasant rambling talk; whilst the rain poured down in fury on the stone terraces and green lawns without, and the Szalrassee was hidden under a veil of fog.

'Am I not to see her at all?' thought Sabran. He did not like to express his disquietude on that subject to the physician, and he was not sure himself whether he most desired to ride away without meeting the serene eyes of his châtelaine, or to be face to face with her once more.

He stood long before her portrait, done by Carolus Duran; she wore in it a close-fitting gown of white velvet, and held in her hand a great Spanish hat with white plumes; the two hounds were beside her; the attitude had a certain grandeur and gravity in it which were very impressive.

'This was painted last year,' said Greswold, 'at the Princess's request. It is admirably like——'

'It is a noble picture,' said Sabran. 'But what a very proud woman she looks!'

'Blood tells,' said Greswold, 'far more than most people know or admit. It is natural that my lady, with the blood in her of so many mighty nobles, who had the power of judgment and chastisement over whole provinces, should be sometimes disposed to exercise too despotic a will, to be sometimes contemptuous of the dictates of modern society, which sends the princess and the peasant alike to a law court for sole redress of their wrongs. She

is at times irreconcilable with the world as it stands; she is the representative and descendant in a direct line of arrogant and omnipotent princes. That she combines with that natural arrogance and instinct of dominion a very beautiful pitifulness and even humility is a proof of the chastening influence of religious faith on the nature of women; we are too apt to forget that, in our haste to destroy the Church. Men might get on perhaps very well without a religion of any kind; but I tremble to think what their mothers and their mistresses would become.'

They passed the morning in animated discussion, and as it drew to a close, the good doctor did not perceive how adroitly his new acquaintance drew out from him all the details of the past and present of Hohenszalras, and of the tastes and habits of its châtelaine, until he knew all that there was to be known of that pure and austere life.

'You may think her grief for her brother Bela's death—for all her brothers' deaths—a morbid sentiment,' said the doctor as he spoke of her. 'But it is not so—no. It is, perhaps, overwrought; but no life can be morbid that is so active in duty, so untiring in charity, so unsparing of itself. Her lands and riches, and all the people dependent on her, are to the Countess Wanda only as so much trust, for which hereafter she will be responsible to Bela and to God. You and I may smile, you and I, who are philosophers, and have settled past dispute that the human life has no more future than the snail-gnawed cabbage, but yet—yet, my dear sir, one cannot deny that there is something exalted in such a conception of duty; and—of this I am convinced—that on the character of a woman it has a very ennobling influence.'

'No doubt. But has she renounced all her youth? Does she mean never to go into the world or to marry?'

'I am quite sure she has made no resolve of the sort. But I do not think she will ever alter. She has refused many great alliances. Her temperament is serene, almost cold; and her ideal it would be difficult, I imagine, for any mortal man to realise.'

'But when a woman loves——'

'Oh, of course,' said Herr Joachim, rather drily. 'If the aloe flower!——Love does not I think possess any part of the Countess Wanda's thoughts or desires. She fancies it a mere weakness.'

'A woman can scarcely be amiable without that weakness.'

'No. Perhaps she is not precisely what we term amiable. She is rather too far also from human emotions and human needs. The women of the house of Szalras have been mostly very proud, silent, brave, and resolute; great ladies rather than lovable wives Luitgarde von Szalras held this place with only a few archers and spearmen against Heinrich Jasomergott in the twelfth century, and he raised the siege after five months. "She is not a woman,

nor human, she is a *kuttengeier*," he said, as he retreated into his Wiener Wald. All the great monk-vultures and the gyps and the pygargues have been sacred all through the Hohe Tauern since that year.'

'And I was about to shoot a *kuttengeier*—now I see that my offence was beyond poaching, it was high treason almost!'

'I heard the story from Otto. He would have hanged you cheerfully. But I hope,' said the doctor, with a pang of misgiving, 'that I have not given you any false impression of my Lady, as cold and hard and unwomanly. She is full of tenderness of a high order; she is the noblest, most truthful, and most generous nature that I have ever known clothed in human form, and if she be too proud—well, it is a stately sin, pardonable in one who has behind her eleven hundred years of fearless and unblemished honour.'

'I am a socialist,' said Sabran, a little curtly; then added, with a little laugh, 'Though I believe not in rank, I do believe in race.'

'*Bon sang ne peut mentir*,' murmured the old physician; the fair face of Sabran changed slightly.

'Will you come and look over the house?' said the Professor, who noticed nothing, and only thought of propitiating the owner of the rare orchid. 'There is almost as much to see as in the Burg at Vienna. Everything has accumulated here undisturbed for a thousand years. Hohenszalras has been besieged, but never deserted or dismantled.'

'It is a grand place!' said Sabran, with a look of impatience. 'It seems intolerable that a woman should possess it all, while I only own a few wind-blown oaks in the wilds of Finisterre.'

'Ah, ah, that is pure socialism!' said the doctor, with a little chuckle. '*Ote-toi, que je m'y mette*. That is genuine Liberalism all the world over.'

'You are no communist yourself, doctor?'

'No,' said Herr Joachim, simply. 'All my studies lead me to the conviction that equality is impossible, and were it possible it would be hideous. Variety, infinite variety, is the beneficent law of the world's life. Why, in that most perfect of all societies, the beehive, flawless mathematics are found co-existent with impassable social barriers and unalterable social grades.'

Sabran laughed good-humouredly.

'I thought at least the bees enjoyed an undeniable Republic.'

'A Republic with helots, sir, like Sparta. A Republic will always have its helots. But come and wander over the castle. Come first and see the parchments.'

'Where are the ladies?' asked Sabran, wistfully.

'The Princess is at her devotions and taking tisane. I visited her this morning; she thinks she has a sore throat. As for our

Lady, no one ever disturbs her or knows what she is doing. When she wants any of us ordinary folks we are summoned. Sometimes we tremble. You know this alone is an immense estate, and then there is a palace at the capital, and one at Salzburg, not to speak of the large estates in Hungary and the mines in Galicia. All these our Lady sees after and manages herself. You can imagine that her secretary has no easy task, and that secretary is herself; for she does not believe in doing anything well by others.'

'A second Maria Theresa!' said Sabran.

'Not dissimilar, perhaps,' said the doctor, nettled at the irony of the tone. 'Only where our great Queen sent thousands out to their deaths the Countess von Szalras saves many lives. There are no mines in the world—I will make bold to say—where there is so much comfort and so little peril as those mines of hers in Stanislaw. She visited them three years hence. But I forget, you are a stranger, and as you do not share our cultus for the Grafin, cannot care to hear its Canticles. Come to the muniment-room; you shall see some strange parchments.'

'Heavens, how it rains!' said Sabran, as they left his chambers. 'Is that common here?'

'Very common, indeed!' said the doctor, with a laugh. 'We pass two-thirds of the year between snow and water. But then we have compensation. Where will you see such grass, such forests, such gardens, when the summer sun does shine?'

The Marquis de Sabran charmed him, and as they wandered over the huge castle the physician delightedly displayed his own erudition, and recognised that of his companion. The Hohenszalrasburg was itself like some black-letter record of old South-German history; it was a chronicle written in stone and wood and iron. The brave old house, like a noble person, contained in itself a liberal education, and the stranger whom through an accident it sheltered was educated enough to comprehend and estimate it at its due value. In his passage through it he won the suffrages of the household by his varied knowledge and correct appreciation. In the stables his praises of the various breeds of horses there commended itself by its accuracy to Ulrich, the *stallmeister*, not less than a few difficult shots in the shooting gallery proved his skill to his enemy of the previous day, Otto, the *jägermeister*. Not less did he please Hubert, who was learned in such things, with his cultured admiration of the wonderful old gold and silver plate, the Limoges dishes and bowls, the Vienna and Kronenthal china; nor less the custodian of the pictures, a collection of Flemish and German masters, with here and there a modern *capolavoro*, hung all by themselves in a little vaulted gallery which led into a much larger one consecrated to tapestries, Flemish, French, and Florentine.

When twilight came, and the greyness of the rain-charged

atmosphere deepened into the dark of night, Sabran had made all living things at the castle his firm friends, down to the dogs of the house, save and except the ladies who dwelt in it. Of them he had had no glimpse. They kept their own apartments. He began to feel some fresh embarrassment at remaining another night beneath a roof the mistress of which did not deign personally to recognise his presence. A salon hung with tapestries opened out of the bedchamber allotted to him; he wondered if he were to dine there like a prisoner of state.

He felt an extreme reluctance united to a strong curiosity to meet again the woman who had treated him with such cool authority and indifference as a common poacher in her woods. His cheek tingled still, whenever he thought of the manner in which, at her signal, his hands had been tied, and his rifle taken from him. She was the representative of all that feudal, aristocratic, despotic, dominant spirit of a dead time which he, with his modern, cynical, reckless Parisian Liberalism, most hated, or believed that he hated. She was Austria Felix personified, and he was a man who had always persuaded himself and others that he was a socialist, a Philippe Egalité. And this haughty patrician had mortified him and then had benefited and sheltered him!

He would willingly have gone from under her roof without seeing her, and yet a warm and inquisitive desire impelled him to feel an unreasonable annoyance that the day was going by without his receiving any intimation that he would be allowed to enter her presence, or be expected to make his obeisances to her. When, however, the servants entered to light the many candles in his room, Hubert entered behind them, and expressed the desire of his Lady that the Marquis would favour them with his presence: they were about to dine.

Sabran, standing before the mirror, saw himself colour like a boy: he knew not whether he were most annoyed or pleased. He would willingly have ridden away leaving his Napoleons for the household, and seeing no more the woman who had made him ridiculous in his own eyes; yet the remembrance of her haunted him as something strange, imperious, magnetic, grave, serene, stately; vague memories of a thousand things he had heard said of her in embassies and at courts came to his mind; she had been a mere unknown name to him then; he had not listened, he had not cared, but now he remembered all he had heard; curiosity and an embarrassment wholly foreign to him struggled together in him. What could he say to a woman who had first insulted and then protected him? It would tax all the ingenuity and the tact for which he was famed. However, he only said to the major-domo, 'I am much flattered. Express my profound gratitude to your ladies for the honour they are so good as to do me.' Then he made his attire look as well as it could, and considering that punctuality is due from guests as well as from monarchs, he said that he was

ready to follow the servant waiting for him, and did so through the many tapestried and panelled corridors by which the enormous house was traversed.

Though light was not spared at the burg it was only such light as oil and wax could give the galleries and passages; dim mysterious figures loomed from the rooms and shadows seemed to stretch away on every side to vast unknown chambers that might hold the secrets of a thousand centuries. When he was ushered into the radiance of the great white room he felt dazzled and blinded.

He felt his bruise still, and he walked with a slight lameness from a strain of his left foot, but this did not detract from the grace and distinction of his bearing, and the pallor of his handsome features became them; and when he advanced through the open doors and bent before the chair and kissed the hands of the Princess Ottilie she thought to herself, 'What a perfectly beautiful person! Even Wanda will have to admit that!' Whilst Hubert, going backward, said to his regiment of under-servants: 'Look you! since Count Gela rode out to his death at the head of the White Hussars, so grand a man as this stranger has not set foot in this house.'

He expected to see the Countess Wanda von Szalras. Instead, he saw the loveliest little old lady he had ever seen in his life, clad in a semi-conventual costume, leaning on a gold-headed cane, with clouds of fragrant old lace about her, and a cross of emeralds hung at her girdle of onyx beads, who saluted him with the ceremonious grace of that etiquette which is still the common rule of life amongst the great nobilities of the north. He hastened to respond in the same spirit with an exquisite deference of manner.

She greeted him with affable and smiling words, and he devoted himself to her with deference and gallantry, expressing all his sense of gratitude for the succour and shelter he received, with a few eloquent and elegant phrases which said enough and not too much, with a grace that it is difficult to lend to gratitude, which is generally somewhat halting and uncouth.

'His name must be in the Hof-Kalender!' she thought, as she replied to his protestations with her prettiest smile which, despite her sacred calling and her seventy years, was the smile of a coquette.

'M. le Marquis,' she said, in her tender and flute-like voice, 'I deserve none of your eloquent thanks. Age is sadly selfish. I did nothing to rescue you, unless, indeed, Heaven heard my unworthy prayer!—and this house is not mine, nor anything in it; the owner of it, and, therefore, your châtelaine of the moment, is my grand-niece, the Countess Wanda von Szalras.'

'That I had your intercession with Heaven, however indirectly, was far more than I deserved,' said Sabran, still standing before her. 'For the Countess Wanda, I have been twice in her power, and she has been very generous.'

'She has done her duty, nothing more,' said the Princess a little primly and petulantly, if princesses and petulance can mingle. 'We should have scarce been Christians if we had not striven for your life. As to leaving us this day it was out of the question. The storm continues, the passes are torrents; I fear much that it will even be impossible for your servant to come from S. Johann; we could not send to Matrey even this morning for the post-bag, and they tell me the bridge is down over the Burgenbach.'

'I have wanted for nothing, and my Parisian rogue is quite as well yawning and smoking his days away at S. Johann,' said Sabran. 'Oh, Madame! how can I ever express to you all my sense of the profound obligations you have laid me under, stranger that I am!'

'At least we were bound to atone for the incivility of the Szalrassee,' said the Princess, with her pretty smile. 'It is a very horrible country to live in. My niece, indeed, thinks it Arcadia; but an Arcadia subject to the most violent floods, and imprisoned in snow and frost for so many months, does not commend itself to me; no doubt it is very grand and romantic.'

The ideal of the Princess was neither grand nor romantic: it was life in the little prim, yet gay north German town in the palace of which she and all her people had been born; a little town, with red roofs, green alleys, straight toy-like streets, clipped trees, stiff soldiers, set in the midst of a verdant plain; flat and green, and smooth as a card table.

The new comer interested her; she was quickly won by personal beauty, and he possessed this in a great degree. It was a face unlike any she had ever seen: it seemed to her to bear mystery with it and melancholy, and she loved both those things; perhaps because she had never met with either out of the pages of German poets and novelists of France. Those who are united to them in real life find them uneasy bedfellows.

'Perhaps he is some Kronprinz in disguise,' she thought with pleasure; but then she sadly recollected that she knew every crown prince that there was in Europe. She would have liked to have ask him many questions, but her high-breeding was still stronger than her curiosity; and a guest could never be interrogated.

Dinner was announced as served.

'My niece, the Countess Wanda,' said the Princess, with a little reluctance visible in her hesitation, 'will dine in her own rooms. She begs you to excuse her; she is tired from the storm last night.'

'She will not dine with me,' thought Sabran, with the quick intuition natural to him.

'You leave me nothing to regret, Princess,' he said readily, with a sweet smile, as he offered his arm to this lovely little lady, wrapped in laces fine as cobweb, with her great cross of emeralds pendent from her rosary.

A woman is never too old to be averse to the thought that she can charm; very innocent charming was that of the Princess Ottilie, and she thought with a sigh if she had married—if she had had such a son; yet she was not insensible to the delicate compliment which he paid her in appearing indifferent to the absence of his châtelaine and quite content with her own presence.

Throughout dinner in that great hall, he, sitting on her right hand, amused her, flattered her with that subtlest of all flattery, interest and attention; diverted her with gay stories of worlds unknown to her, and charmed her with his willingness to listen to her lament over the degeneracy of mankind and of manners. After a few words of courtesy as to his hostess's absence he seemed not even to remember that Wanda von Szalras was absent from the head of her table.

'And I have said that she was tired! She who is never more tired than the eagles are! May Heaven forgive me the untruth!' thought the Princess more than once during the meal, which was long and magnificent, and at which her guest ate sparingly and drank but little.

'You have no appetite?' she said, regretfully.

'Pardon me, I have a good one,' he answered her; 'but I have always been content to eat little and drink less. It is the secret of health; and my health is all my riches.'

She looked at him with interest.

'I should think your riches in that respect are inexhaustible?'

He smiled.

'Oh yes! I have never had a day's illness, except once, long ago in the Mexican swamps, a marsh fever and a snake-bite.'

'You have travelled much?'

'I have seen most of the known world, and a little of the unknown,' he answered. 'I am like Ulysses; only there will be not even a dog to welcome me when my wanderings are done.'

'Have you no relatives?'

'None!' he added, with an effort. 'Every one is dead; dead long ago. I have been long alone, and I am very well used to it.'

'But you must have troops of friends?'

'Oh!—friends who will win my last napoleon at play, or remember me as long as they meet me every day on the boulevards? Yes, I have many of that sort, but they are not worth Ulysses' dog.'

He spoke carelessly, without any regard to the truth as far as it went, but no study would have made him more apt to coin words to attract the sympathy of his listener.

'He is unfortunate,' she thought. 'How often beauty brings

misfortune. My niece must certainly see him. I wish he belonged to the Pontêves-Bargêmes!'

Not to have a name that she knew, one of those names that fill all Europe as with the trump of an archangel, was to be as one maimed or deformed in the eyes of the Princess, an object for charity, not for intercourse.

'Your title is of Brittany, I think?' she said a little wistfully; and as he answered something abruptly in the affirmative, she solaced herself once more with the remembrance that there was a good deal of *petite noblesse*, honourable enough, though not in the 'Almanac de Gotha,' which was a great concession from her prejudices, invented on the spur of the interest that he excited in her imagination.

'I never saw any person so handsome,' she thought, as she glanced at his face; while he in return thought that this silver-haired, soft-cheeked, lace-enwrapped Holy Mother was *jolie à croquer* in the language of those boulevards, which had been his nursery and his palestrum. She was so kind to him, she was so gracious and graceful, she chatted with him so frankly and pleasantly, and she took so active an interest in his welfare that he was touched and grateful. He had known many women, many young ones and gay ones; he had never known what the charm of a kindly and serene old age can be like in a woman who has lived with pure thoughts, and will die in hope and in faith; and this lovely old abbess, with her pretty touch of worldliness, was a study to him, new with the novelty of innocence, and of a kind of veneration. And he was careful not to let her perceive his mortification that the Countess von Szalras would not deign to dine in his presence. In truth, he thought of little else, but no trace of irritation or of absence of mind was to be seen in him as he amused the Princess, and discovered with her that they had in common some friends amongst the nobilities of Saxony, of Wurtemberg, and of Bohemia.

'Come and take your coffee in my own room, the blue-room,' she said to him, and she rose and took his arm. 'We will go through the library; you saw it this morning, I imagine! It is supposed to contain the finest collection of Black Letter in the empire, or so we think.'

And she led him through the great halls and up a few low stairs into a large oval room lined with oaken bookcases, which held the manuscripts, missals, and volumes of all dates which had been originally gathered together by one of the race who had been also a bishop and a cardinal.

The library was oak-panelled, and had an embossed and emblazoned ceiling; silver lamps of old Italian *trasvorato* work, hung by silver chains, and shed a subdued clear light; beneath the porphyry sculptures of the hearth a fire of logs was burning, for the early summer evening here is chill and damp; there were many

open fireplaces in Hohenszalras, introduced there by a chilly Provençal princess, who had wedded a Szalras in the seventeenth century, and who had abolished the huge porcelain stoves in many apartments in favour of grand carved mantel-pieces, and gilded andirons, and sweet smelling simple fires of aromatic woods such as made glad the sombre hotels and lonely châteaux of the France of the Bourbons.

Before this hearth, with the dogs stretched on the black bear-skin rugs, his hostess was seated; she had dined in a small dining-hall opening out of the library, and was sitting reading with a shaded light behind her. She rose with astonishment, and, as he fancied, anger upon her face as she saw him enter, and, stood in her full height beneath the light of one of the silver hanging lamps. She wore a gown of olive-coloured velvet, with some pale roses fastened amongst the old lace at her breast; she had about her throat several rows of large pearls, which she always wore night and day that they should not change their pure whiteness by disuse; she looked very stately, cold, annoyed, disdainful, as she stood there without speaking.

'It is my niece, the Countess von Szalras,' said the Princess to her companion in some trepidation. 'Wanda, my love, I was not aware you were here; I thought you were in your own octagon room; allow me to make you acquainted with your guest, whom you have already received twice with little ceremony I believe.'

The trifling falsehoods were trippingly but timidly said; the Princess's blue eyes sought consciously her niece's forgiveness with a pathetic appeal, to which Wanda, who loved her tenderly, could not be long obdurate. Had it been any other than Mdme. Ottilie who had thus brought by force into her presence a stranger whom she had marked her desire to avoid, the serene temper of the mistress of the Hohenszalrasburg would not have preserved its equanimity, and she would have quitted her library on the instant, sweeping a grand courtesy which should have been greeting and farewell at once to one too audacious. But the shy entreating appeal of the Princess's regard touched her heart, and the veneration she had borne from childhood to one so holy, and so sacred by years of grace, checked in her any utterance or sign of annoyance.

Sabran, meanwhile, standing by in some hesitation and embarrassment, bowed low with consummate grace, and a timidity not less graceful.

She advanced a step and held her hand out to him.

'I fear I have been inhospitable, sir,' she said to him in his own tongue. 'Are you wholly unhurt? You had a rough greeting from Hohenszalras.'

He took the tip of her fingers on his own and bent over them as humbly as over an empress's.

Well used to the world as he was, to its ceremonies, courts, and etiquettes, he was awed by her as if he were a youth; he lost

his ready aptness of language, and his easy manner of adaptability.

'I am but a vagrant, Madame!' he murmured, as he bowed over her hand. 'I have no right even to your charity!'

For the moment it seemed to her as if he spoke in bitter and melancholy earnest, and she looked at him in a passing surprise that changed into a smile.

'You were a poacher certainly, but that is forgiven. My aunt has taken you under her protection; and you had the Kaiser's already: with such a dual shelter you are safe. Are you quite recovered?' she said, bending her grave glance upon him. 'I have to ask your pardon for my great negligence in not sending one of my men to guide you over the pass to Matrey.'

'Nay, if you had done so I should not have enjoyed the happiness of being your debtor,' he replied, meeting her close gaze with a certain sense of confusion most rare with him; and added a few words of eloquent gratitude, which she interrupted almost abruptly:

'Pray carry no such burden of imaginary debt, and have no scruples in staying as long as you like; we are a mountain refuge, use it as you would a monastery. In the winter we have many travellers. We are so entirely in the heart of the hills that we are bound by all Christian laws to give a refuge to all who need it. But how came you on the lake last evening? Could you not read the skies?'

He explained his own folly and hardihood, and added, with a glance at her, 'The offending rifle is in the Szalrassee. It was my haste to quit your dominions that made me venture on to the lake. I had searched in vain for the high road that you had told me of, and I thought if I crossed the lake I should be off your soil.'

'No; for many leagues you would not have been off it,' she answered him. 'Our lands are very large, and, like the Archbishopric of Berchtesgarten, are as high as they are broad. Our hills are very dangerous for strangers, especially until the snows of the passes have all melted. I repented me too late that I did not send a jäger with you as a guide.'

'All is well that ends well,' said the Princess. 'Monsieur is not the worse for his bath in the lake, and we have the novelty of an incident and of a guest, who we will hope in the future will become a friend.'

'Madame, if I dared hope that I should have much to live for!' said the stranger, and the Princess smiled sweetly upon him.

'You must have very much to live for as it is. Were I a man, and as young as you, and as favoured by nature, I am afraid I should be tempted to live for—myself.'

'And I am most glad when I can escape from so poor a companion,' said he, with a melancholy in the accent and a passing pain that was not assumed.

Before this gentle and gracious old woman in this warm and elegant chamber he felt suddenly that he was a wanderer—perhaps an outcast.

'You need not use the French language with him, Wanda,' interrupted the Princess. 'The Marquis speaks admirable German: it is impossible to speak better.'

'We will speak our own tongue then,' said Wanda, who always regarded her aunt as though she were a petted and rather wayward child. 'Are you quite rested, M. de Sabran? and quite unhurt? I did not dine with you. It must have seemed churlish. But I am very solitary in my habits, and my aunt entertains strangers so much better than I do that I grow more hermitlike every year.'

He smiled; he thought there was but little of the hermit in this woman's supreme elegance and dignity as she stood beside her hearth with its ruddy, fitful light playing on the great pearls at her throat and burnishing into gold the bronze shadows of her velvet gown.

'The Princess has told me that you are cruel to the world,' he answered her. 'But it is natural with such a kingdom that you seldom care to leave it.'

'It is a kingdom of snow for seven months out of the year,' said the Princess peevishly, 'and a water kingdom the other five. ou see what it is to-day, and this is the middle of May!'

'I think one might well forget the rain and every other ill between these four walls,' said the French Marquis, as he glanced around him, and then slowly let his eyes rest on his châtelaine.

'It is a grand library,' she answered him; 'but I must warn you that there is nothing more recent in it than Diderot and Descartes. The cardinal—Hugo von Szalras—who collected it lived in the latter half of last century, and since his day no Szalras has been bookish save myself. The cardinal, however, had all the MSS. and the black letters, or nearly all, ready to his hand; what he added is a vast library of science and history, and he also got together some of the most beautiful missals in the world. Are you curious in such things?'

She rose as she spoke, and unlocked one of the doors of the oak bookcase and brought out an ivory missal carved by the marvellous Prönner of Klagenfurt, with the arms of the Szalras on one side of it and those of a princely German house on the other.

'That was the nuptial missal of Georg von Szalras and Ida Windisgratz in 1501,' she said; 'and these are all the other marriage-hours of our people, if you care to study them; and in that case next to this there is a wonderful Evangelistarium, with miniatures of Angelico's. But I see they tell all their stories to you; I see by the way you touch them that you are a connoisseur.'

'I fear I have studied them chiefly at the sales of the Rue

Drouot,' said Sabran, with a smile; but he had a great deal of sound knowledge on all arts and sciences, and a true taste which never led him wrong. With an illuminated chronicle in his hand, or a book of hours on his knee, he conversed easily, discursively, charmingly, of the early scribes and the early masters; of monkish painters and of church libraries; of all the world has lost, and of all aid that art had brought to faith.

He talked well, with graceful and well-chosen language, with picturesque illustration, with a memory that never was at fault for name or date, or apt quotation; he spoke fluent and eloquent German, in which there was scarcely any trace of foreign accent; and he disclosed without effort the resources of a cultured and even learned mind.

The antagonism she had felt against the poacher of her woods melted away as she listened and replied to him; there was a melody in his voice and a charm in his manner that it was not easy to resist; and with the pale lights from the Italian lamp which swung near upon the fairness of his face she reluctantly owned that her aunt had been right: he was singularly handsome, with that uncommon and grand cast of beauty which in these days is rarer than it was in the times of Vandyck and of Velasquez—for manners and moods leave their trace on the features, and this age is not great.

The Princess in her easy-chair, for once not sleeping after dinner, listened to her and thought to herself, 'She is angry with me; but how much better it is to talk with a living being than to pass the evening over a philosophical treatise, or the accounts of her schools, or her stables!'

Sabran having conquered the momentary reluctance and embarrassment which had overcome him in the presence of the woman to whom he owed both an outrage and a rescue, endeavoured, with all the skill he possessed, to interest and beguile her attention. He knew that she was a great lady, a proud woman, a recluse, and a student, and a person averse to homage and flattery of every kind; he met her on the common ground of art and learning, and could prove himself her equal at all times, even occasionally her master. When he fancied she had enough of such serious themes he spoke of music. There was a new opera then out at Paris, of which the theme was as yet scarcely known. He looked round the library and said to her:

'Were there an organ here or a piano I could give you some idea of the motive; I can recall most of it.'

'There are both in my own room. It is near here,' she said to him. 'Will you come?'

Then she led the way across the gallery, which alone separated the library from that octagon room which was so essentially her own where all were hers. The Princess accompanied her: content as a child is who has put a light to a slow match that leads it

knows not whither. 'She must approve of him, or she would not take him there,' thought the wise Princess.

'Go and play to us,' said Wanda von Szalras, as her guest entered the sacred room. 'I am sure you are a great musician; you speak of music as we only speak of what we love.'

'What do you love?' he wondered mutely, as he sat down before the grand piano and struck a few chords. He sat down and played without prelude one of the most tender and most grave of Schubert's sonatas. It was subtle, delicate, difficult to interpret, but he gave it with consummate truth of touch and feeling. He had always loved German music best. He played on and on, dreamily, with a perfection of skill that was matched by his tenderness of interpretation.

'You are a great artist,' said his hostess, as he paused.

He rose and approached her.

'Alas! no, I am only an amateur,' he answered her. 'To be an artist one must needs have immense faith in one's art and in oneself: I have no faith in anything. An artist steers straight to one goal; I drift.'

'You have drifted to wise purpose—— You must have studied much?'

'In my youth. Not since. An artist! Ah! how I envy artists! They believe; they aspire; even if they never attain, they are happy, happy in their very torment, and through it, like lovers.'

'But your talent——'

'Ah, Madame, it is only talent; it is nothing else. The *feu sacré* is wanting.'

She looked at him with some curiosity.

'Perhaps the habit of the world has put out that fire: it often does. But if even it be only talent, what a beautiful talent it is! To carry all that store of melody safe in your memory—it is like having sunlight and moonlight ever at command.'

Lizst had more than once summoned the spirits of Heaven to his call there in that same room in Hohenszalras; and since his touch no one had ever made the dumb notes speak as this stranger could do, and the subdued power of his voice added to the melody he evoked. The light of the lamps filled with silvery shadows the twilight of the chamber; the hues of the tapestries, of the ivories, of the gold and silver work, of the paintings, of the embroideries, made a rich chiaro-oscuro of colour; the pine cones and the dried thyme burning on the hearth shed an aromatic smell on the air; there were large baskets and vases full of hothouse roses and white lilies from the gardens; she sat by the hearth, left in shadow except where the twilight caught the gleam of her pearls and the shine of her eyes; she listened, the jewels on her hand glancing like little stars as she slowly waved to and fro a feather screen in rhythm with what he sang or played: so might Mary

Stuart have looked, listening to Rizzio or Ronsard. 'She is a queen!' he thought, and he sang—

'Si j'étais Roi!'

'Go on!' she said, as he paused; he had thrown eloquence and passion into the song.

'Shall I not tire you?'

'That is only a phrase! Save when Liszt passes by here I never hear such music as yours.'

He obeyed her, and played and sang many and very different things.

At last he rose a little abruptly.

Two hours had gone by since they had entered the octagon chamber.

'It would be commonplace to thank you,' she murmured with a little hesitation. 'You have a great gift; one of all gifts the most generous to others.'

He made a gesture of repudiation, and walked across to a spinet of the fifteenth century, inlaid with curious devices by Martin Pacher of Brauneck, and having a painting of his in its lid.

'What a beautiful old box!' he said, as he touched it. 'Has it any sound, I wonder? If one be disposed to be sad, surely of all sad things an old spinet is the saddest! To think of the hands that have touched, of the children that have danced to it, of the tender old ballads that have been sung to the notes that to us seem so hoarse and so faulty! All the musicians dead, dead so long ago, and the old spinet still answering when any one calls! Shall I sing you a madrigal to it?'

Very tenderly, very lightly, he touched the ivory keys of the painted toy of the ladies so long dead and gone, and he sang in a minor key the sweet, sad, quaint poem:—

Où sont les neiges d'antan?

That ballad of fair women echoed softly through the stillness of the chamber, touched with the sobbing notes of the spinet, even as it might have been in the days of its writer:

Où sont les neiges d'antan?

The chords of the old music-box seemed to sigh and tremble with remembrance. Where were they, all the beautiful dead women, all the fair imperious queens, all the loved and all the lovers? Where were they? The snow had fallen through so many white winters since that song was sung—so many! so many!

The last words thrilled sadly and sweetly through the silence.

He rose and bowed very low.

'I have trespassed too long on your patience, Madame; I have the honour to wish you good-night.'

Wanda von Szalras was not a woman quickly touched to any emotion, but her eyelids were heavy with a mist of unshed tears, as she raised them and looked up from the fire, letting drop on her lap the screen of plumes.

'If there be a Lorelei in our lake, no wonder from envy she tried to drown you,' she said, with a smile that cost her a little effort. 'Good-night, sir; should you wish to leave us in the morning, Hubert will see you reach S. Johann safely and as quickly as can be.'

'Your goodness overwhelms me,' he murmured. 'I can never hope to show my gratitude——'

'There is nothing to be grateful for,' she said quickly. 'And if there were, you would have repaid it: you have made a spinet, silent for centuries, speak, and speak to our hearts. Good-night, sir; may you have good rest and a fair journey!'

When he had bowed himself out, and the tapestry of the door had closed behind him, she rose and looked at a clock.

'It is actually twelve!'

'Acknowledge at least that he has made the evening pass well!' said the Princess, with a little petulance and much triumph.

'He has made it pass admirably,' said her niece. 'At the same time, dear aunt, I think it would have been perhaps better if you had not made a friend of a stranger.'

'Why?' said the Princess with some asperity.

'Because I think we can fulfil all the duties of hospitality without doing so, and we know nothing of this gentleman.'

'He is certainly a gentleman,' said the Princess, with not less asperity. 'It seems to me, my dear Wanda, that you are for once in your life—if you will pardon me the expression—ill-natured.'

The Countess Wanda smiled a little.

'I cannot imagine myself ill-natured; but I may be so. One never knows oneself.'

'And ungrateful,' added the Princess. 'When, I should like to know, have you for years reached twelve o'clock at night without being conscious of it?'

'Oh, he sang beautifully, and he played superbly,' said her niece, still with the same smile, balancing her ostrich-feathers. 'But let him go on his way to-morrow; you and I cannot entertain strange men, even though they give us music like Rubenstein's.'

'If Egon were here——'

'Oh, poor Egon! I think he would not like your friend at all. They both want to shoot eagles——'

'Perhaps he would not like him for another reason,' said the Princess, with a look of mystery. 'Egon could never make the spinet speak.'

'No; but who knows? Perhaps he can take better care of his own soul because he cannot lend one to a spinet!'

'You are perverse, Wanda!'

'Perverse, inhospitable, and ill-natured? I fear I shall carry a heavy burden of sins to Father Ferdinand in the morning!'

'I wish you would not send horses to S. Johann in the morning. We never have anything to amuse us in this solemn solitary place.'

'Dear aunt, one would think you were very indiscreet.'

'I wish you were more so!' said the pretty old lady with impatience, and then her hand made a sign over the cross of emeralds, for she knew that she had uttered an unholy wish. She kissed her niece with repentant tenderness, and went to her own apartments.

Wanda von Szalras, left alone in her chamber, stood awhile thoughtfully beside the fire; then she moved away and touched the yellow ivory of the spinet keys.

'Why could he make them speak,' she said to herself, 'when every one else always failed?'

CHAPTER IV.

SABRAN, as he undressed himself and laid himself down under the great gold-fringed canopy of the stately bed, thought: 'Was I only a clever comedian to-night, or did my eyes really grow wet as I sang that old song and saw her face through a mist as if she and I had met in the old centuries long ago?'

He stood and looked a moment at his own reflection in the great mirror with the wax candles burning in its sconces. He was very pale.

Où sont les neiges d'antan?

The burden of it ran through his mind.

Almost it seemed to him long ago—long ago—she had been his lady and he her knight, and she had stooped to him, and he had died for her. Then he laughed a little harshly.

'I grow that best of all actors,' he thought, 'an actor who believes in himself!'

Then he turned from the mirror and stretched himself on the great bed, with its carved warriors at its foot and its golden crown at its head, and its heavy amber tissues shining in the shadows. He was a sound sleeper at all times. He had slept peacefully on a wreck, in a hurricane, in a lonely hut on the Andes, as after a night of play in Paris, in Vienna, in Monaco. He had a nerve of steel, and that perfect natural constitution which even excess and dissipation cannot easily impair. But this night, under the roof of Hohenszalras, in the guest-chamber of Hohenszalras, he could not summon sleep at his will, and he lay long wide awake and

restless, watching the firelight play on the figures upon the tapestried walls, where the lords and ladies of Tuscan Boccaccio and their sinful loves were portrayed in stately and sombre guise, and German costumes of the days of Maximilian.

. . . . . Où sont les neiges d'antan ?

The line of the old romaunt ran through his brain, and when towards dawn he did at length fall asleep it was not of Hohenszalras that he dreamed, but of wide white steppes, of a great ice-fed rolling river, of monotonous pine-woods, with the gilded domes of a half eastern city rising beyond them in the pale blue air of a northern twilight.

With the early morning he awoke, resolute to get away be the weather what it would. As it chanced, the skies were heavy still, but no rain fell; the sun was faintly struggling through the great black masses of cloud; the roads might be dangerous, but they were not impassable; the bridge over the Bürgenbach might be broken, but at least Matrey could be reached, if it were not possible to go on farther to Taxenbach or S. Johann im Wald. High north, where far away stretched the wild marshes and stony swamps of the Pinzgau (the Pinzgau so beautiful, where in its hilly district the grand Salzach rolls on its impetuous way beneath deep shade of fir-clad hills, tracks desolate as a desert of sand or stone), the sky was overcast, and of an angry tawny colour that brooded ill for the fall of night. But the skies were momentarily clear, and he desired to rid of his presence the hospitable roof beneath which he was but an alien and unbidden.

He proposed to leave on foot, but of this neither Greswold nor the major-domo would hear: they declared that such an indignity would dishonour the Hohenszalrasburg for evermore. Guests there were masters. 'Bidden guests, perhaps,' said Sabran, reluctantly yielding to be sped on his way by a pair of the strong Hungarian horses that he had seen and admired in their stalls. He did not venture to disturb the ladies of the castle by a request for a farewell audience at the early hour at which it was necessary he should depart if he wished to try to reach a railway the same evening, but he left two notes for them, couched in that graceful compliment of which his Parisian culture made him an admirable master, and took a warm adieu of the good physician, with a promise not to forget the orchid of the Espiritù Santo. Then he breakfasted hastily, and left the tapestried chamber in which he had dreamed of the Nibelungen Queen.

At the door he drew a ring of great value from his finger and passed it to Hubert, but the old man, thanking him, protested he dared not take it.

'Old as I am in her service,' he said, 'the Countess would dismiss me in an hour if I accepted any gifts from a guest.'

'Your lady is very severe,' said Sabran. 'It is happy for her

she has servitors who subscribe to feudalism. If she were in Paris——'

'We are bound to obey,' said the old man, simply. 'The Countess deals with us most generously and justly. We are bound, in return, to render her obedience.'

'All the antique virtues have indeed found refuge here!' said Sabran; but he left the ring behind him lying on a table in the Rittersaal.

Four instead of two vigorous and half-broke horses from the Magyar plains bore him away in a light travelling carriage towards the Virgenthal; the household, with Herr Joachim at their head, watching with regret the travelling carriage wind up amongst the woods and disappear on the farther side of the lake. He himself looked back with a pang of envy and regret at the stately pile towering towards the clouds, with its deep red banner streaming out on the wind that blew from the northern plains.

'Happy woman!' he thought; 'happy—thrice happy—to possess such dominion, such riches, and such ancestry! If I had had them I would have had the world under my foot as well!'

It was with a sense of pain that he saw the great house disappear behind its screen of mantling woods, as his horses climbed the hilly path beyond, higher and higher at every step, until all that he saw of Hohenszalras was a strip of the green lake—green as an acorn leaf—lying far down below, bearing on its waters the grey willows of the Holy Isle.

'When I am very old and weary I will come and die there,' he thought, with a touch of that melancholy which all his irony and cynicism could not dispel from his natural temper. There were moments when he felt that he was but a lonely and homeless wanderer on the face of the earth, and this was one of those moments, as, alone, he went upon his way along the perilous path, cut along the face of precipitous rocks, passing over rough bridges that spanned deep defiles and darkening ravines, clinging to the side of a mountain as a swallow's nest clings to the wall of a house, and running high on swaying galleries above dizzy depths, where nameless torrents plunged with noise and foam into impenetrable chasms. The road had been made in the fifteenth century by the Szalras lords themselves, and the engineering of it was bold and vigorous though rude, and kept in sound repair, though not much changed.

He had left a small roll of paper lying beside the ring in the knight's hall. Hubert took them both to his mistress when, a few hours later, he was admitted to her presence. Opening the paper she saw a roll of a hundred napoleons, and on the paper was written, 'There can be no poor where the Countess von Szalras rules. Let these be spent in masses for the dead.'

'What a delicate and graceful sentiment!' said the Princess Ottilie, with vivacity and emotion.

'It is prettily expressed and gracefully thought of,' her niece admitted.

'Charmingly—admirably!' said the Princess, with a much warmer accent. 'There is delicate gratitude there, as well as a proper feeling towards a merciful God.'

'Perhaps,' said her niece, with a little smile, 'the money was won at play, in giving some one else what they call a *culotte*; what would you say then, dear aunt? Would it be purified by entering the service of the Church?'

'I do not know why you are satirical,' said the Princess; 'and I cannot tell either how you can bring yourself to use Parisian bad words.'

'I will send these to the Bishop,' said Wanda, rolling up the gold. 'Alas! alas! there are always poor. As for the ring, Hubert, give it to Herr Greswold, and he will transmit it to this gentleman's address in Paris, as though it had been left behind by accident. You were so right not to take it; but my dear people are always faithful.'

These few words were dearer and more precious to the honest old man than all the jewels in the world could ever have become. But the offer of it and the gift of the gold for the Church's use had confirmed the high opinion in which he and the whole household of Hohenszalras held the departed guest.

'Allow at least that this evening will be much duller than last!' said the Princess, with much irritation.

'Your friend played admirably,' said Wanda von Szalras, as she sat at her embroidery frame.

'You speak as if he were an itinerant pianist! What is your dislike to your fellow-creatures, when they are of your own rank, based upon? If he had been a carpet-dealer from the Defreggerthal, as I said before, you would have bidden him stay a month.'

'Dearest aunt, be reasonable. How was it possible to keep here on a visit a French Marquis of whom we know absolutely nothing, except from himself?'

'I never knew you were prudish!'

'I never knew either that I was,' said the Countess Wanda, with her serene temper unruffled. 'I quite admit your new friend has many attractive qualities—on the surface at any rate; but if it were possible for me to be angry with you, I should be so for bringing him as you did into the library last night.'

'You would never have known your spinet could speak if I had not. You are very ungrateful, and I should not be in the least surprised to find that he was a Crown Prince or a Grand Duke travelling incognito.'

'We know them all, I fear.'

'It is strange he should not have his name in the Hof-Kalender, beside the Sabran-Pontèves!' insisted the Princess. 'He looks *prince du sang*, if ever any one did; so——'

'There is good blood outside your Hof-Kalender, dear mother mine.'

'Certainly,' said the Princess, 'he must surely be a branch of that family, though it would be more satisfactory if one found his record there. One can never know too much or too certainly of a person whom one admits to friendship.'

'Friendship is a very strong word,' said Wanda von Szalras, with a smile. 'This gentleman has only made a hostelry of Hohenszalras for a day or two, and even that was made against his will. But as you are so interested in him, *meine Liebe,* read this little record I have found.'

She gave the Princess an old leather-bound volume of memoirs, written and published at Lausanne, by an obscure noble in his exile, in the year 1798. She had opened the book at one of the pages that narrated the fates of many nobles of Brittany, relatives or comrades of the writer.

'And foremost amongst these,' said this little book, 'do I ever and unceasingly regret the loss of my beloved cousin and friend, Yvon Marquis de Sabran-Romaris. So beloved was he in his own province that even the Convention was afraid to touch him, and being poor, despite his high descent, as his father had ruined his fortunes in play and splendour at the court of Louis XV., he thought to escape the general proscription, and dwell peaceably on his rock-bound shores with his young children. But the blood-madness of the time so grew upon the nation that even the love of his peasantry and his own poverty could not defend him, and one black, bitter day an armed mob from Vannes came over the heath, burning all they saw of ricks, or homesteads, or châteaux, or cots, that they might warm themselves by those leaping fires; and so they came on at last, yelling, and drunk, and furious, with torches flaming and pikes blood-stained, up through the gates of Romaris. Sabran went out to meet them, leading his eldest son by the hand, a child of eight years old. "What seek ye?" he said to them: "I am as poor as the poorest of you, and consciously have done no living creature wrong. What do you come for here?" The calm courage of him, and the glance of his eyes, which were very beautiful and proud, quelled the disordered, mouthing, blood-drunk multitude in a manner, and moved them to a sort of reverence, so that the leader of them, stepping forth, said roughly, "Citizen, we come to slit your throat and burn your house; but if you will curse God and the King, and cry 'Long live the sovereign people!' we will leave you alone, for you have been the friend of the poor. Come, say it!—come, shout it with both lungs!—it is not much to ask." Sabran put his little boy behind him with a tender gesture, then kissed the hilt of his sword, which he held unsheathed in his hand: "I sorrow for the people," he said, "since they are misguided and mad. But I believe in my God and I love my King, and even so shall my children do after me;"

and the words were scarce out of his mouth before a score of pikes ran him through the body, and the torches were tossed into his house, and he and his perished like so many gallant gentlemen of the time, a prey to the blind fury of an ingrate mob.'

The Princess Ottilie's tender eyes moistened as she read, and she closed the volume reverently, as though it were a sacred thing.

'I thank you for sending me such a history,' she said. 'It does one's soul good in these sad, bitter days of spiritless selfishness and utter lack of all impersonal devotion. This gentleman must, then, be a descendant of the child named in this narrative?'

'The story says that he and his perished,' replied her niece. 'But I suppose that child, or some other younger one, escaped the fire and the massacre. If ever we see him again, we will ask him. Such a tradition is as good as a page in the Almanac de Gotha.'

'It is,' accented the Princess. 'Where did you find it?'

'I read those memoirs when I was a child, with so many others of that time,' answered the Countess Wanda. 'When I heard the name of your new friend it seemed familiar to me, and thinking over it, I remembered these Breton narratives.'

'At least you need not have been afraid to dine with him!' said the Princess Ottilie, who could never resist having the last word, though she felt that the retort was a little ungenerous, and perhaps undeserved.

Meantime Sabran went on his way through the green valley under the shadow of the Klein and the Kristallwand, with the ice of the great Schaltten Gletscher descending like a huge frozen torrent. When he reached the last stage before Matrey he dismissed his postillions with a gratuity as large as the money remaining in his belt would permit, and insisted on taking his way on foot over the remaining miles. Baggage he had none, and he had not even the weight of his knapsack and rifle. The men remonstrated with him, for they were afraid of their lady's anger if they returned when they were still half a German mile off their destination. But he was determined, and sent them backwards, whilst they could yet reach home by daylight. The path to Matrey passed across pastures and tracts of stony ground; he took a little goatherd with him as a guide, being unwilling to run the risk of a second misadventure, and pressed on his way without delay.

The sun had come forth from out a watery world of cloud and mist, which shrouded from sight all the domes and peaks and walls of ice of the mountain region in which he was once more a wanderer. But when the mists had lifted, and the sun was shining, it was beautiful exceedingly: all the grasses were full of the countless wild flowers of the late Austrian spring; the swollen brooks were blue with mouse-ear, and the pastures with gentian; clumps of daffodils blossomed in all the mossy nooks, and

hyacinths purpled the pine-woods. On the upper slopes the rain-fog still hung heavily, but the sun-rays pierced it here and there, and the white vaporous atmosphere was full of fantastic suggestions and weird half-seen shapes, as pine-trees loomed out of the mist or a vast black mass of rock towered above the clouds. A love of nature, of out-of-door movement, of healthful exercise and sports, resisted in him the enervating influences of the Paris life which he had led. He had always left the gay world at intervals for the simple and rude pleasures of the mountaineer and the hunter. There was an impulse towards that forest freedom which at times mastered him, and made the routine of worldly dissipation and diversion wholly intolerable to him. It was what his fair critic of Paris had called his barbarism, which broke up out of the artificial restraints and habits imposed by the world.

His wakeful night had made him fanciful, and his departure from Hohenszalras had made him regretful; for he, on his way back to Paris and all his habits and associates and pleasures, looking around him on the calm white mountain-sides, and penetrated by the pure, austere mountain silence, suddenly felt an intense desire to stay amidst that stillness and that solitude, and rest here in the green heart of the Tauern.

'Who knows but one might see her again?' he thought, as the sound of the fall of the Gschlossbach came on his ear from the distance. That stately figure seated by the great wood fire, with the light on her velvet skirts, and the pearls at her throat, and the hounds lying couched beside her, was always before his memory and his vision.

And he paid and dismissed his goatherd at the humble door of the Zum Rautter in Windisch-Matrey, and that evening began discussing with Christ Rangediner and Egger, the guides there, the ascent of the Kahralpe and the Lasörling, and the pass to Krimml, over the ice crests of the Venediger group.

A mountaineer who had dwelt beneath the shadow of Orizaba was not common in the heart of the Tauern, and the men made much of their new comrade, not the less because the gold pieces rattled in his pouch, and the hunting-watch he carried had jewels at its back.

'If any one had told me that in the Mois de Marie I should bury myself under an Austrian glacier!' he thought, with some wonder at his own decision, for he was one of those foster-sons of Paris to whom *parisine* is an habitual and necessary intoxication.

But there comes a time when even parisine, like chloral, ceases to have power to charm; in a vague way he had often felt the folly and the hollowness of the life that turned night into day, made the green cloth of the gaming-table the sole field of battle, and offered as all form of love the purchased smile of the *belle petite*. A sense of repose and of freshness, like the breath of a cool morning blowing on tired eyes, came to him as he sat in the grey

twilight amidst the green landscape, with the night coming down upon the eternal snows above, whilst the honest, simple souls around him talked of hill perils and mountaineers' adventures, and all the exploits of a hardy life; and in the stillness, when their voices ceased, there was no sound but the sound of water up above amidst the woods, tumbling and rippling in a hundred unseen brooks and falls.

'If they had let me alone,' he thought, 'I should have been a hunter all my days; a guide, perhaps, like this Christ and this Egger here. An honest man, at least——'

His heart was heavy and his conscience ill at ease. The grand, serene glance of Wanda von Szalras seemed to have reached his soul and called up in him unavailing regrets, pangs of doubt long dormant, vague remorse long put to sleep with the opiate of the world-taught cynicism, which had become his second nature. The most impenetrable cynicism will yield and melt, and seem but a poor armour, when it is brought amidst the solemnity and solitude of the high hills.

CHAPTER V.

A few days later there arrived by post the 'Espiritù Santo' of Mexico, addressed to the Professor Joachim Greswold.

If he had received the order of the Saint Esprit he would not have been more honoured, more enchanted; and he was deeply touched by the remembrance of him testified by the gift whose donor he supposed was back in the gay world of men, not knowing the spell which the snow mountains of the Tauern had cast on a worldly soul. When he was admitted to the presence of the Princess Ottilie to consult with her on her various ailments, she conversed with him of this passer-by who had so fascinated her fancy, and she even went so far as to permit him to bring her the great volumes of the 'Mexico' out of the library, and point her out those chapters which he considered most likely to interest her.

'It is the work of a true Catholic and gentleman,' she said with satisfaction, and perused with special commendation the passages which treated of the noble conduct of the Catholic priesthood in those regions, their frequent martyrdom and their devoted self-negation. When she had thoroughly identified their late guest with the editor of these goodly and blameless volumes, she was content to declare that better credentials no man could bear. Indeed she talked so continually of this single point of interest in her monotonous routine of life, that her niece said to her, with a jest that was more than half earnest, 'Dearest mother, almost you

make me regret that this gentleman did not break his neck over the Engelhorn, or sink with his rifle in the Szalrassee.'

'The spinet would never have spoken,' said the Princess; 'and I am surprised that a Christian woman can say such things, even in joke!'

The weather cleared, the sun shone, the gardens began to grow gorgeous, and great parterres of roses glowed between the emerald of the velvet lawns: an Austrian garden has not a long life, but it has a very brilliant one. All on a sudden, as the rains ceased, every alley, group, and terrace were filled with every variety of blossom, and the flora of Africa and India was planted out side by side with the gentians and the alpine roses natural to the soil. All the northern coniferæ spread the deep green of their branches above the turf, and the larch, the birch, the beech, and the oak were massed in clusters, or spread away in long avenues—deep defiles of foliage through which the water of the lake far down below glistened like a jewel.

'If your friend had been a fortnight later he would have seen Hohenszalras in all its beauty,' said its mistress once to the Princess Ottilie. 'It has two seasons of perfection: one its midsummer flowering, and the other when all the world is frozen round it.'

The Princess shivered in retrospect and in anticipation. She hated winter. 'I should never live through another winter,' she said with a sigh.

'Then you shall not be tried by one; we will go elsewhere,' said Wanda, to whom the ice-bound world, the absolute silence, the sense of the sleigh flying over the hard snow, the perfect purity of the rarefied air of night and day, made up the most welcome season of the year.

'I suppose it is dull for you,' she added, indulgently. 'I have so many occupations in the winter; a pair of skates and a sleigh are to me of all forms of motion the most delightful. But you, shut up in your blue-room, do no doubt find our winter hard and long.'

'I hybernate, I do not live,' said the Princess, pettishly. 'It is not even as if the house were full.'

'With ill-assorted guests whose cumbersome weariness one would have to try all day long to dissipate! Oh, my dear aunt, of all wearisome *corvées* the world holds there is nothing so bad as a house party—even when Egon is here to lead the cotillion and the hunting.'

'You are very inhospitable!'

'That is the third time lately you have made that charge against me. I begin to fear that I must deserve it.'

'You deserve it, certainly. Oh, you are hospitable to the poor. You set pedlars, or mule-drivers, or travelling clockmakers, by the dozen round your hall fires, and you would feed a pilgrimage all

the winter long. But to your own order, to your own society, you are inhospitable. In your mother's time the Schloss had two hundred guests for the autumn parties, and then the winter season, from Carnival to Easter, was always spent in the capital.'

'She liked that, I suppose.'

'Of course she liked it; every one ought to like it at what was her age then, and what is yours now.'

'I like this,' said the Countess Wanda, to change the subject, as the servants set a little Japanese tea-table and two arm-chairs of gilt osier-work under one of the Siberian pines, whose boughs spread tent-like over the grass, on which the dogs were already stretched in anticipation of sugar and cakes.

From this lawn there were seen only the old keep of the burg and the turrets and towers of the rest of the building; ivy clambered over one-half of the great stone pile, that had been raised with hewn rock in the ninth century; and some arolla pines grew about it. A low terrace, with low broad steps, separated it from the gardens. A balustrade of stone, ivy-mantled, protected the gardens from the rocks; while these plunged in a perpendicular descent of a hundred feet into the lake. Some black yews and oaks, very large and old, grew against the low stone pillars. It was a favourite spot with the mistress of Hohenszalras; it looked westward, and beyond the masses of the vast forests there shone the snow summit of the Venediger and the fantastic peaks of the Klein and Kristallwand, whilst on a still day there could be heard a low sound which she, familiar with it, knew came from the thunder of the subterranean torrents filling the Szalrassee.

'Oh, it is very nice,' said the Princess, a little deprecatingly. 'And of course I at my years want nothing better than a gilt chair in the sunshine. But then there is so very little sunshine! The chair must generally stand by the stove! And I confess that I think it would be fitter for your years and your rank if these chairs were multiplied by ten or twenty, and if there were some pretty people laughing and talking and playing games in those great gardens.'

'It is glorious weather now,' said her niece, who would not assent and did not desire to dispute.

'Yes,' interrupted the Princess. 'But it will rain to-morrow. You know we never have two fine days together.'

'We will take it while we have it, and be thankful,' said Wanda, with a good-humour that refused to be ruffled. 'Here is Hubert coming out to us. What can he want? He looks very startled and alarmed.'

The old major-domo's face was indeed gravely troubled, as he bowed before his lady.

'Pardon me the intrusion, my Countess,' he said hurriedly. 'But I thought it right to inform you myself that a lad has come over from Steiner's Inn to say that the foreign gentleman who was

here fifteen days ago has had an accident on the Umbal glacier. It seems he stayed on in Matrey for sake of the climbing and the shooting. I do not make out from the boy what the accident was, but the Umbal is very dangerous at this season. The gentleman lies now at Pregratten. You know, my ladies, what a very wretched place that is.'

'I suppose they have come for the Herr Professor?' said Wanda, vaguely disturbed, while the Princess very sorrowfully was putting a score of irrelevant questions which Hubert could not answer.

'No doubt he has no doctor there, and these people send for that reason,' said Wanda, interrupting with an apology for the useless interrogations. 'Get horses ready directly, and send for Greswold at once wherever he may be. But it is a long bad way to Pregratten; I do not see how he can return under twenty-four hours.'

'Let him stay two nights, if he be wanted,' said the Princess, to whom she spoke. She had always insisted that the physician should never be an hour out of Hohenszalras whilst she was in it.

'Your friend has been trying to shoot a *kuttengeier* again, I suppose,' said her niece, with a smile. 'He is very adventurous.'

'And you are very heartless.'

Wanda did not deny the charge; but she went into the house, saw the doctor, and requested him to take everything with him of linen, wines, food, or cordials that might possibly be wanted.

'And stay as long as you are required,' she added, 'and send mules over to us for anything you wish for. Do not think of us. If my dear aunt should ail anything I can despatch a messenger to you, or call a physician from Salzburg.'

Herr Joachim said a very few words, thanked her gratefully, and took his departure behind two sure-footed mountain cobs that could climb almost like chamois.

'I think one of the Fathers should have gone too,' said Mdme. Ottilie, regretfully.

'I hope he is not *in extremis*,' said her niece. 'And I fear if he were he would hardly care for spiritual assistance.'

'You are so prejudiced against him, Wanda!'

'I do not think I am ever prejudiced,' said the Countess von Szalras.

'That is so like a prejudiced person!' said the Princess, triumphantly.

For twenty-four hours they heard nothing from Pregratten, which is in itself a miserable little hamlet lying amidst some of the grandest scenes that the earth holds: towards evening the next day a lad of the village came on a mule and brought a letter to his ladies from the Herr Professor, who wrote that the accident had been due, as usual, to the gentleman's own carelessness, and to

the fact of the snow being melted by the midsummer sun until it was a thin crust over a deep crevasse. He had found his patient suffering from severe contusions, high fever, lethargy, and neuralgic pains, but he did not as yet consider there were seriously dangerous symptoms. He begged permission to remain, and requested certain things to be sent to him from his medicine-chests and the kitchens.

The boy slept at Hohenszalras that night, and in the morning returned over the hills to Pregratten with all the doctor had asked for. Wanda selected the medicines herself, and sent also some fruit and wine for which he did not ask: the Princess sent a bone of S. Ottilie in an ivory case and the assurance of her constant prayers. She was sincerely anxious and troubled. 'Such a charming person, and so handsome,' she said again and again. 'I suppose the priest of Pregratten is with him.'

Her niece did not remind her that her physician did not greatly love any priests whatever, though on that subject he was always discreetly mute at Hohenszalras.

For the next ten days Greswold stayed at Pregratten, and the Princess bore his absence, since it was to serve a person who had had the good fortune to fascinate her, and whom also she chose to uphold because her niece was, as she considered, unjust to him. Moreover, life at the burg was very dull to the Princess, whatever it might be to its châtelaine, who had so much interest in its farms, its schools, its mountains, and its villages: an interest which to her great-aunt seemed quite out of place, as all those questions, she considered, should belong to the priesthood and the stewards, who ought not to be disturbed in their direction, the one of spiritual and the other of agricultural matters. This break in the monotony of her time was agreeable to her—of the bulletins from Pregratten, of the despatch of all that was wanted, of the additional pleasure of complaining that she was deprived of her doctor's counsels, and also of feeling at the same time that in enduring this deprivation she was doing a charitable and self-denying action. She further insisted on sending out to Steiner's Inn, greatly to his own discomfort, her own confessor.

'Nobles of Brittany have always deep religious feeling,' she said to her niece; 'and Father Ferdinand has such skill and persuasion with the dying.'

'But no one is dying,' said Wanda, a little impatiently.

'That is more than any human being can tell,' said the Princess, piously. 'At all events, Father Ferdinand always uses every occasion judiciously and well.'

Father Ferdinand, however, was not very comfortable in Pregratten, and soon returned, much jolted and worn by the transit on a hill pony. He was reserved about his visitation, and told his patroness sadly that he had been unable to effect much spiritual good, but that the stranger was certainly recovering from his hurts,

and had the ivory case of S. Ottilie on his pillow; he had seemed averse, however, to confession, and therefore, of course, there had been no possibility for administration of the Sacrament.

The Princess was inclined to set this rebelliousness down to the fault of the physician, and determined to talk seriously to Greswold on spiritual belief as soon as he should return.

'If he be not orthodox we cannot keep him,' she said, severely.

'He is orthodox, dear aunt,' said Wanda von Szalras, with a smile. 'He adores the wonders of every tiny blossom that blows, and every little moss that clothes the rocks.'

'What a profane, almost sacrilegious answer!' said the Princess. 'I never should have imagined that *you* would have jested on sacred themes.'

'I did not intend a jest. I was never more serious. A life like our old Professor's is a perpetual prayer.'

'Your great-aunt Walburga belonged to the Perpetual Adoration,' rejoined the Princess, who only heard the last word but one. 'The order was very severe. I always think it too great a strain on finite human powers. She was betrothed to the Margraf Paul, but he was killed at Austerlitz, and she took refuge in a life of devotion. I always used to think that you would change Hohenszalras into a sacred foundation; but now I am afraid. You are a deeply religious woman, Wanda—at least I have always thought so—but you read too much German and French philosophy, and I fear it takes something from your fervour, from your entirety of devotion. You have a certain liberty of expression that alarms me at times.'

'I think it is a poor faith that dares not examine its adversaries' charges,' said her niece, quietly. 'You would have faith blindfolded. They call me a bigot at the Court, however. So you see it is hard to please all.'

'Bigot is not a word for a Christian and Catholic sovereign to employ,' said the Princess, severely. 'Her Majesty must know that there can never be too great an excess in faith and service.'

On the eleventh day Greswold returned over the hills and was admitted to immediate audience with his ladies.

'Herr von Sabran is well enough for me to leave him,' he said, after his first very humble salutations. 'But if your excellencies permit, it would be desirable for me to return there in a day or two. Yes, my ladies, he is lying at Steiner's Inn in Pregratten, a poor place enough, but your goodness supplied much that was lacking in comfort. He can be moved before long. There was never any great danger, but it was a very bad accident. He is a good mountaineer it seems, and he had been climbing a vast deal in the Venediger group; that morning he meant to cross the Umbal glacier to the Ahrenthal, and he refused to take a guide, so Isaiah Steiner tells me.'

'But I thought he left here to go to Paris?'

'He did so, my Countess,' answered the doctor. 'But it seems he loves the mountains, and their spell fell on him. When he sent back your postillions he went on foot to Matrey, and there he remained; he thought the weather advanced enough to make climbing safe; but it is a dangerous pastime so early in summer, though Christ from Matrey, who came over to see him, tells me he is of the first form as a mountaineer. He reached the Clarahutte safely, and broke his fast there; crossing the Umbal the ice gave way, and he fell into a deep crevasse. He would be a dead man, if a hunter on the Welitz side had not seen him disappear and given the alarm at the hut. With ropes and men enough they contrived to haul him up, after some hours, from a great depth. These accidents are very common, and he has to thank his own folly in going out on to the glacier unaccompanied. Of course he was insensible, contused, and in high fever when I reached there: the surgeon they had called from Lienz was an ignorant, who would soon have sent him for ever to as great a deep as the crevasse. He is very grateful to you both, my ladies, and would be more so were he not so angry with himself that it makes him sullen with the world. Men of his kind bear isolation and confinement ill. Steiner's is a dull place: there is nothing to hear but the tolling of the church bell and the fret of the Isel waters.'

'That means, my friend, that you want him moved as soon as he can bear it?' said Wanda. 'I think he cannot very well come here. We know nothing of him. But there is no reason why you should not bring him to the Lake Monastery. There is a good guest-chamber (the Archbishop stayed there once), and he could have your constant care there, and from here every comfort.'

'Why should he not be brought to this house?' interrupted Mdme. Ottilie; 'there are fifty men in it already——'

'Servants and priests, no strangers. Beside, this gentleman will be much more at his ease on the Holy Isle, where he can recompense the monks at his pleasure; he would feel infinitely annoyed to be further burdened with a hospitality he never asked!'

'Of course it is as you please!' said the Princess, a little irritably.

'Dear aunt! when he is on the island you can send him all the luxuries and all the holy books you may think good for him. Go over to the monks if you will be so kind, Herr Joachim, and prepare them for a sick guest; and as for transport and all the rest of the assistance you may need, use the horses and the household as you see fit. I give you carte blanche. I know your wisdom and your prudence and your charity.'

The physician again returned to Pregratten, where he found his patient fretting with restless impatience at his enforced imprisonment. He had a difficulty in persuading Sabran to go back to that Szalrassee which had cost him so dear; but when he was assured

that he could pay the monks what he chose for their hospitality, he at last consented to be taken to the island.

'I shall see her again,' he thought, with a little anger at himself. The mountain spirits had their own way of granting wishes, but they had granted his.

On the Holy Isle of the Szalrassee there was a small Dominican congregation, never more than twelve, of men chiefly peasant-born, and at this time all advanced in years. The monastery was a low, grey pile, almost hidden beneath the great willows and larches of the isle, but rich within from many centuries of gifts in art from the piety of the lords of Szaravola. It had two guest-chambers for male visitors, which were lofty and hung with tapestry, and which looked down the lake towards the north and west, to where beyond the length of water there rose the mighty forest hills washed by the Salzach and the Ache, backed by the distant Rhætian Alps.

The island was almost in the centre of the lake, and, at a distance of three miles, the rocks, on which the castle stood, faced it across the water that rippled around it and splashed its trees and banks. It was a refuge chosen in wild and rough times when repose was precious, and no spot on earth was ever calmer, quieter, more secluded than this where the fishermen never landed without asking a blessing of those who dwelt there, and nothing divided the hours except the bells that called to prayer or frugal food. The green willows and the green waters met and blended and covered up this house of peace as a warbler's nest is hidden in the reeds. A stranger resting-place had never befallen the world-tossed, restless, imperious, and dissatisfied spirit of the man who was brought there by careful hands lying on a litter, on a raft, one gorgeous evening of a summer's day—one month after he had lifted his rifle to bring down the *kuttengeier* in the woods of Wanda von Szalras.

'Almost thou makest me believe,' he murmured, when he lay and looked upward at the cross that shone against the evening skies, while the raft glided slowly over the water, and from the walled retreat upon the isle there came the low sound of the monks chanting their evensong.

They laid him down on a low, broad bed opposite a window of three bays, which let him look from his couch along the shining length of the Szalrassee towards the great burg, where it frowned upon its wooded cliffs with the stone brows of many mountains towering behind it, and behind them the glaciers of the Glöckner and its lesser comrades.

The sun had just then set. There was a lingering glow upon the water, a slender moon had risen above a distant chain of pine-clothed hills, the slow, soft twilight of the German Alps was bathing the grandeur of the scene with tenderest, faintest colours and mists ethereal. The Ave Maria was ringing from the chapel,

and presently the deep bells of the monastery chimed a Laus Deus.

'Do you believe in fate?' said Sabran abruptly to his companion Greswold.

The old physician gave a little gesture of doubt.

'Sometimes there seems something stronger than ourselves and our will, but maybe it is only our own weakness that has risen up and stands in another shape like a giant before us, as our shadow will do on a glacier in certain seasons and states of the atmosphere.'

'Perhaps that is all,' said Sabran. But he laid his head back on his pillow with a deep breath that had in it an equal share of contentment and regret, and lay still, looking eastward, while the peaceful night came down upon land and water unbroken by any sound except that of a gentle wind stirring amidst the willows or the plunge of an otter in the lake.

That deep stillness was strange to him who had lived so long in all the gayest cities of the world; but it was welcome: it seemed like a silent blessing: his life seemed to stand still while holy men prayed for him and the ramparts of the mountains shut out the mad and headlong world.

With these fancies he fell asleep and dreamed of pathless steppes, which in the winter snows were so vast and vague, stretching away, away, away to the frozen sea and the ice that no suns can melt, and ceaseless silence, where sleep is death.

In the monastic quiet of the isle he soon recovered sufficient strength to leave his bed and move about slowly, though he was still stiff and sprained from the fall on the Umbal; he could take his dinner in the refectory, could get out and sit under the great willows of the bank, and could touch their organ as the monks never had heard it played.

It was a monotonous and perfectly simple life; but either because his health was not yet strong, or because he had been surfeited with excitement, it was not disagreeable or irksome to him; he bore it with a serenity and cheerfulness which the monks attributed to religious patience, and Herr Joachim to philosophy. It was not one nor the other: it was partly from such willingness as an over-taxed racer feels to lie down in the repose of the stall for a while to recruit his courage and speed: it was partly due to the certainty which he felt that now, sooner or later, he must see face to face once more the woman who had forbade him to shoot the vulture.

The face which had looked on him in the pale sunlight of the pine-woods, and made him think of the Nibelungen Queen, had been always present to his thoughts, even during the semi-stupor of sedative-lulled rest in his dull chamber by the lonely Isel stream.

From this guest-room, where he passed his convalescence, the wide casements all day long showed him the towers and turrets,

the metal roofs, the pinnacles and spires of her mighty home, backed by its solemn neighbours of the glacier and the alps, and girdled with the sombre green of the great forests. Once or twice he thought as he looked at it and saw the noon sun make its countless oriels sparkle like diamonds, or the starlight change its stones and marbles into dream-like edifices meet for Arthur's own Avilion, once or twice he thought to himself, 'If I owned Hohenszalras, and she Romaris, I would write to her and say: "A moment is enough for love to be born."'

But Romaris was his—those aged oaks, torn by sea-winds and splashed with Atlantic spray, were all he had; and she was mistress here.

When a young man made his first appearance in the society of Paris who was called Réné Philippe Xavier, Marquis de Sabran-Romaris, his personal appearance, which was singularly attractive, his manners, which were of extreme distinction, and his talents, which were great, made him at once successful in its highest society. He had a romantic history.

The son of that Marquis de Sabran who had fallen under the pikes of the mob of Carrier had been taken in secret out of the country by a faithful servant, smuggled on board a *chassemarée*, which had carried him to an outward-bound sailing ship destined for the seaboard of America. The chaplain was devoted, the servant faithful. The boy was brought up well at a Jesuit college in Mexico, and placed in full possession, when he reached manhood, of his family papers and of such remnants of the family jewels as had been brought away with him. His identity as his father's only living son, and the sole representative of the Sabrans of Romaris, was fully established and confirmed before the French Consulate of the city. Instead of returning to his country, as his Jesuit tutors advised and desired, the youth, when he left college, gave the reins to a spirit of adventure and a passion for archæology and natural history. He was possessed beyond all with the desire to penetrate the mystery of the buried cities, and he had conceived a strong attachment to the flowery and romantic land of Guatemozin and of Montezuma. He plunged, therefore, into the interior of that country, and, half as a Jesuit lay-missionary, and half as an archæological explorer, let all his best years slip away under the twilight shadows of the virgin forests, and amidst the flowering wilderness of the banks of the great rivers, making endless notes upon the ancient and natural history of these solitudes, and gathering together an interminable store of tradition from the Indians and the half-breeds with whom he grew familiar. He went farther and farther away from the cities, and let longer and longer intervals elapse without his old friends and teachers hearing anything of him. All that was known of him was that he had married a beautiful Mexican woman, who was said to have in her the blood of the old royal race, and that he lived far

from the steps of white men in the depth of the hills whence the Pacific was in sight. Once he went to the capital for the purpose of registering and baptizing his son by his Mexican wife. After that he was lost sight of by those who cared for him, and it was only known that he was compiling a history of those lost nations whose temples and tombs, amidst the wilderness, had so powerfully attracted his interest as a boy. A quarter of a century passed; his old friends died away one by one, nobody remained in the country who remembered or asked for him. The West is wide, and wild, and silent; endless wars and revolutions changed the surface of the country and the thoughts of men; the scholarly Marquis de Sabran, who only cared for a hieroglyphic, or an orchid, or a piece of archaic sculpture, passed away from the memories of the white men whose fellow student he had been. The land was soaked in blood, the treasures were given up to adventurers; the chiefs that each reigned their little hour, slew, and robbed, and burned, and fell in their turn shot like vultures or stabbed like sheep; and no one in that murderous *tohu-bohu* had either time or patience to give to the thought of a student of perished altars and of swamp-flora. The college, even, where the Jesuits had sheltered him, had been sacked and set on fire, and the old men and the young men butchered indiscriminately. When six-and-twenty years later he returned to the capital to register the birth of his grandson there was no one who remembered his name. Another quarter of a century passed by, and when his young representative left the Western world for Paris he received a tender and ardent welcome from men and women to whom his name was still a talisman, and found a cordial recognition from that old nobility whose pride is so cautious and impregnable in its isolation and reserve. Every one knew that the young Marquis de Sabran was the legitimate representative of the old race that had made its nest on the rocks with the sea birds through a dozen centuries: that he had but little wealth was rather to his credit than against it.

When he gave to the world, in his grandfather's name, the result of all those long years of study and of solitude in the heart of the Mexican forests, he carried out the task as only a scientific scholar could have done it, and the vast undigested mass of record, tradition, and observation which the elder man had collected together in his many years of observation and abstraction were edited and arranged with so much skill that their mere preparation placed their young compiler in the front rank of culture. That he disclaimed all merit of his own, affirming that he had simply put together into shape all the scattered memoranda of the elder scholar, did not detract from the learning or from the value of his annotations. The volumes became the first authority on the ancient history and the natural history of a strange country, of which alike the past and the present were of rare interest, and

their production made his name known where neither rank nor grace would have taken it. To those who congratulated him on the execution of so complicated and learned a work, he only replied: 'It is no merit of mine; all the learning is his. In giving it to the world I do but pay my debt to him, and I am but a mere instrument of his as the printing-press is that prints it.'

This modesty, this affectionate loyalty in a young man whose attributes seemed rather to lie on the side of arrogance, of disdainfulness, and of coldness, attracted to him the regard of many persons to whom the mere idler, which he soon became, would have been utterly indifferent. He chose, as such persons thought, most unfortunately, to let his intellectual powers lie in abeyance, but he had shown that he possessed them. No one without large stores of learning and a great variety of attainments could have edited and annotated as he had done the manuscripts bequeathed to him by the Marquis Xavier as his most precious legacy. He might have occupied a prominent place in the world of science; but he was too indolent or too sceptical even of natural facts, or too swayed towards the pleasures of manhood, to care for continued consecration of his life to studies of which he was early a master, and it was the only serious work that he ever carried out or seemed likely ever to attempt. Gradually these severe studies were left farther and farther behind him; but they had given him a certain place that no future carelessness could entirely forfeit. He grew to prefer to hear a *bluette d'amateur* praised at the Mirliton, to be more flattered when his presence was prayed for at a *première* of the Française; but it had carried his name wherever, in remote corners of the earth, two or three wise men were gathered together.

He had no possessions in France to entail any obligations upon him. The single tower of the manoir which the flames had left untouched, and an acre or two of barren shore, were all which the documents of the Sabrans enabled him to claim. The people of the department were indeed ready to adore him for the sake of the name he bore; but he had the true Parisian's impatience of the province, and the hamlet of Romaris but rarely saw his face. The sombre seaboard, with its primitive people, its wintry storms, its monotonous country, its sad, hard, pious ways of life, had nothing to attract a man who loved the gaslights of the Champs-Elysées. Women loved him for that union of coldness and of romance which always most allures them, and men felt a certain charm of unused power in him which, coupled with his great courage and his skill at all games, fascinated them often against their judgment. He was a much weaker man than they thought him, but none of either sex ever discovered it. Perhaps he was also a better man than he himself believed. As he dwelt in the calm of this religious community his sins seemed to him many and beyond the reach of pardon.

Yet even with remorse, and a sense of shame in the background, this tranquil life did him good. The simple fare, the absence of excitement, the silent lake-dwelling where no sound came, except that of the bells or the organ, or the voices of fishermen on the waters, the 'early to bed and early to rise,' which were the daily laws of the monastic life—these soothed, refreshed, and ennobled his life.

CHAPTER VI.

The days drifted by; the little boat crossed thrice a day from castle to monastery, bringing the physician, bringing books, food, fruit, wine; the rain came often, sheets of white water sweeping over the lake, and blotting the burg and the hills and the forests from sight; the sunshine came more rarely, but when it came it lit up the amphitheatre of the Glöckner group to a supreme splendour, of solemn darkness of massed pines, of snow-peaks shrouded in the clouds. So the month wore away; he was in no haste to recover entirely; he could pay the monks for his maintenance, and so felt free to stay, not being allowed to know that his food came from the castle as his books did. The simple priests were conquered and captivated by him; he played grand Sistine masses for them, and canticles which he had listened to in Nôtre Dame. Herr Joachim marvelled to see him so passive and easily satisfied; for he perceived that his patient could not be by nature either very tranquil or quickly content; but the doctor thought that perhaps the severe nervous shock of the descent on the Umbal might have shakened and weakened him, and knew that the pure Alpine air, the harmless pursuits, and the early hours were the best tonics and restoratives in the pharmacy of Nature. Therefore he could consistently encourage him to stay, as his own wishes moved him to do; for to the professor the companionship and discussion of a scholarly and cultivated man were rarities, and he had conceived an affectionate interest in one whose life he had in some measure saved; for without skilled care the crevasse of the Iselthal might have been fatal to a mountaineer who had successfully climbed the highest peaks of the Andes.

'No doubt if I passed a year here,' thought Sabran, 'I should rebel and grow sick with longing for the old unrest, the old tumult, the old intoxication—no doubt; but just now it is very welcome: it makes me comprehend why De Rancy created La Trappe, why so many soldiers and princes and riotous livers were glad to go out into a Paraclete amongst the hills with S. Bruno or S. Bernard.'

He said something of the sort to Herr Joachim, who nodded

consent; but added: 'Only they took a great belief with them, and a great penitence, the recluses of that time; in ours men mistake satiety for sorrow, and so when their tired vices have had time to grow again, like nettles that have been gnawed to the root but can spring up with fresh power to sting, then, as their penitence was nothing but fatigue, they get quickly impatient to go out and become beasts again. All the difference between our times and S. Bruno's lies there; they believed in sin, we do not. I say, "we," I mean the voluptuaries and idlers of your world.'

'Perhaps not,' answered Sabran, a little gloomily. 'But we do believe in dishonour.'

'Do you?' said the doctor, with some irony. 'Oh, I suppose you do. You may seduce Gretchen: you must not forsake Faustine; you must not lie to a man: you may lie to a woman. You must not steal: you may beggar your friend at baccara. I confess I have never understood the confusion of your unwritten laws on ethics and etiquette.'

Sabran laughed, but he did not take up the argument; and the doctor thought that he seemed becoming a little morose; since his escape from the tedium of confinement at Pregratten, confinement intolerable to a man of strength and spirit, he had always found his patient of great equability of temper, and of a good-humour and docility that had seemed as charming as they were invariable.

When he was recovered enough to make movement and change harmless to him, there came to him a note in the fine and miniature writing of the Princess Ottilie, bidding him come over to the castle at his pleasure, and especially inviting him, in her niece's name, to the noon-day breakfast at the castle on the following day, if his strength allowed.

He sat a quarter of an hour or more with the note on his knee, looking out at the light green willow foliage as it drooped above the deeper green of the lake.

'Our ladies are not used to refusals,' said the doctor, seeing his hesitation.

'I should be a churl to refuse,' said Sabran, with some little effort, which the doctor attributed to a remembered mortification, and so hastened to say:

'You are resentful still that the Countess Wanda took your rifle away? Surely she has made amends?'

'I was not thinking of that. She was perfectly right. She only treated me too well. She placed her house and her household at my disposition with a hospitality quite Spanish. I owe her too much ever to be able to express my sense of it.'

'Then you will come and tell her so?'

'I can do no less.'

Princess Ottilie and the mistress of Hohenszalras had had a

discussion before that note of invitation was sent; a discussion which had ended as usual in the stronger reasoner giving way to the whim and will of the weaker.'

'Why should we not be kind to him?' the Princess had urged; 'he is a gentleman. You know I took the precaution to write to Kaulnitz; Kaulnitz's answer is clear enough: and to Frohsdorf, from which it was equally satisfactory. I wrote also to the Comte de la Barée; his reply was everything which could be desired.'

'No doubt,' her niece had answered for the twentieth time; 'but I think we have already done enough for Christianity and hospitality; we need not offer him our personal friendship; as there is no master in this house he will not expect to be invited to it. We will wish him God-speed when he is fully restored and is going away.'

'You are really too prudish!' said the Princess, very angrily. 'I should be the last person to counsel an imprudence, a failure in due caution, in correct reserve and hesitation; but for you to pretend that a Countess von Szalras cannot venture to invite a person to her own residence because that person is of the opposite sex——'

'That is not the question; the root of the matter is that he is a chance acquaintance made quite informally; we should have been cruel if we had done less than we have done, but there can be no need that we should do more.'

'I can ask more about him of Kaulnitz,' said Madame Ottilie.

Kaulnitz was one of her innumerable cousins, and was then minister in Paris.

'Why should you?' said her niece. 'Do you think either that it is quite honourable to make inquiries unknown to people? It always savours to me too much of the Third Section.'

'You are so exaggerated in all your scruples; you prefer to be suspicious of a person in silence than to ask a few questions,' said the Princess. 'But surely when two ambassadors and the Kaiser guarantee his position you may be content.'

The answer she had received from Kaulnitz had indeed only moderately satisfied her. It said that there was nothing known to the detriment of the Marquis de Sabran; that he had never been accused of anything unfitting his rank and name; but that he was a *viveur*, and was said to be very successful at play; he was not known to have any debts, but he was believed to be poor and of precarious fortunes. On the whole the Princess had decided to keep the answer to herself; she had remembered with irritation that her niece had suggested baccara as the source of the hundred gold pieces.

'I never intended to convey that ambassadors would disown him or the Kaiser either, whose signature is in his pocket-book. Only,' said Wanda, 'as you and I are all alone, surely it will be as

well to leave this gentleman to the monks and to Greswold. That is all I mean.'

'It is a perfectly unnecessary scruple, and not at all like one of your race. The Szalras have always been hospitable and headstrong.'

'I hope I am the first—I have done my best for M. de Sabran; as for being headstrong—surely that is not a sweet or wise quality that you should lament my loss of it?'

'You need not quarrel with me,' said the Princess, pettishly. 'You have a terrible habit of contradiction, Wanda; and you never give up your opinion.'

The mistress of Hohenszalras smiled, and sighed a little.

'Dear mother, we will do anything that amuses you.'

So the note was sent.

The Princess had been always eager for such glimpses of the moving world as had been allowed to her by any accidental change. Her temperament would have led her to find happiness in the frivolous froth and fume of a worldly existence; she delighted in gossip, in innocent gaiety, in curiosity, in wonder; all her early years had been passed under repression and constraint, and now in her old age she was as eager as a child for any plaything, as inquisitive as a marmoset, as animated as a squirrel. Her mother had been a daughter of a great French family of the south, and much of the vivacity and sportive malice and quick temper of the Gallic blood was in her still, beneath the primness and the placidity that had become her habit, from long years passed in a little German court and in a stately semi-religious order.

This stranger whom chance had brought to them was to her idea a precious and providential source of excitement: already a hundred romances had suggested themselves to her fertile mind; already a hundred impossibilities had suggested themselves to her as probable. She did not in the least believe that accident had brought him there. She imagined that he had wandered there for the sake of seeing the mistress of Hohenszalras, who had for so long been unseen by the world, but whose personal graces and great fortune had remained in the memories of many. To the romantic fancy of the Princess, which had never been blunted by contact with harsh facts, nothing seemed prettier or more probable than that the French marquis, when arrested as a poacher, had been upon a pilgrimage of poetic adventure. It should not be her fault, she resolved, if the wounded knight had to go away in sorrow and silence, without the castle gates being swung open once at least.

'After all, if she would only take an interest in anything human,' she thought, 'instead of always horses and mountains, and philosophical treatises and councils, and calculations with the stewards! She ought not to live and die alone. They made me vow to do so, and perhaps it was for the best, but I would never say to any one—Do likewise.'

And then the Princess felt the warm tears on her own cheeks,

thinking of herself as she had been at seventeen, pacing up and down the stiff straight alley of clipped trees at Lilienhöhe with a bright young soldier who had fallen in a duel ere he was twenty. It was all so long ago, so long ago, and she was a true submissive daughter of her princely house, and of her Holy Church; yet she knew that it was not meet for a woman to live and die without a man's heart to beat by her own, without a child's hands to close her glazing eyes.

And Wanda von Szalras wished so to live and so to die! Only one magician could change her. Why should he not come?

So on the morrow the little boat that had brought the physician to him so often took him over the two miles of water to the landing stairs at the foot of the castle rock. In a little while he stood in the presence of his châtelaine.

He was a man who never in his life had been confused, unnerved, or at a loss for words; yet now he felt as a boy might have done, as a rustic might; he had a mist before his eyes, his heart beat quickly, he grew very pale.

She thought he was still suffering, and looked at him with interest.

'I am afraid that we did wrong to tempt you from the monastery,' she said, in her grave melodious voice; and she stretched out her hand to him with a look of sympathy. 'I am afraid you are still suffering and weak, are you not?'

He bent low as he touched it.

'How can I thank you?' he murmured. 'You have treated a vagrant like a king!'

'You were a munificent vagrant to our chapel and our poor,' she replied with a smile. 'And what have we done for you? Nothing more than is our commonest duty, far removed from cities or even villages, as we are. Are you really recovered? I may tell you now that there was a moment when Herr Greswold was alarmed for you.'

The Princess Ottilie entered at that moment and welcomed him with more effusion and congratulation. They breakfasted in a chamber called the Saxe room, an oval room lined throughout with lacquered white wood, in the Louis Seize style; the panels were painted in Watteau-like designs; it had been decorated by a French artist in the middle of the eighteenth century, and with its hangings of flowered white satin, and its collection of Meissen china figures, and its great window, which looked over a small garden with velvet grass plots and huge yews, was the place of all others to make an early morning meal most agreeable, whether in summer when the casements were open to the old-fashioned roses that climbed about them, or in winter when on the open hearth great oak logs burned beneath the carved white wood mantelpiece, gay with its plaques of Saxe and its garlands of foliage. The little oval table bore a service of old Meissen, with

tiny Watteau figures painted on a ground of palest rose. Watteau figures of the same royal china upheld great shells filled with the late violets of the woods of Hohenszalras.

'What an enchanting little room!' said Sabran, glancing round it, and appreciating with the eyes of a connoisseur the Lancret designs, the Riesiner cabinets, and the old china. He was as well versed in the art and lore of the Beau Siècle as Arsene Houssaye or the Goncourts; he talked now of the epoch with skill and grace, with that accuracy of knowledge and that fineness of criticism which had made his observations and his approval treasured and sought for by the artists and the art patrons of Paris.

The day was grey and mild; the casements were open; the fresh, pure fragrance of the forests came in through the aromatic warmth of the chamber; the little gay shepherds and shepherdesses seemed to breathe and laugh.

'This room was a caprice of an ancestress of mine, who was of your country, and was, I am afraid, very wretched here,' said Wanda von Szalras. 'She brought her taste from Marly and Versailles. It is not the finest or the purest taste, but it has a grace and elegance of its own that is very charming, as a change.'

'It is a madrigal in porcelain,' he said, looking around him. 'I am glad that the *alouette gauloise* has sung here beside the dread and majestic Austrian vulture.'

'The *alouette gauloise* always sings in Aunt Ottilie's heart; it is what keeps her so young always. I assure you she is a great deal younger than I am,' said his châtelaine, resting a glance of tender affection on the pretty figure of the Princess caressing her Spitz dog Bijou.

She herself, with her great pearls about her throat, and a gown of white serge, looked a stately and almost severe figure beside the dainty picturesque prettiness of the elder lady and the fantastic gaiety and gilding of the porcelain and the paintings. He felt a certain awe of her, a certain hesitation before her, which the habits of the world enabled him to conceal, but which moved him with a sense of timidity, novel and almost painful.

'One ought to be Dorat and Marmontel to be worthy of such a repast,' he said, as he seated himself between his hostesses.

'Neither Dorat nor Marmontel would have enjoyed your very terrible adventure,' said the Princess, reflecting with satisfaction that it was herself who had saved this charming and chivalrous life, since, at her own risk and loss, she had sent her physicians, alike of body and of soul, to wrestle for him with death by his sick bed at Pregratten.

'Wanda would never have sent any one to him,' thought the Princess: 'she is so unaccountably indifferent to any human life higher than her peasantry.'

'Adventures are to the adventurous,' quoted Sabran.

'Yes,' said the Princess; 'but the pity is that the adventurous are too often the questionable——'

'Perhaps that is saying too much,' said Wanda; 'but it is certain that the more solid qualities do not often lead into a career of excitement. It has been always conceded—with a sigh—that duty is dull.'

'I think adventure is like calamity: some people are born to it,' he added, 'and such cannot escape from it. Loyola may cover his head with a cowl: he cannot become obscure. Eugene may make himself an abbé: he cannot escape his horoscope cast in the House of Mars.'

'What a fatalist you are!'

'Do you think we ever escape our fate? Alexander slew all whom he suspected, but he did not for that die in his bed of old age.'

'That merely proves that crime is no buckler.'

Sabran was silent.

'My life has been very adventurous,' he said lightly, after a pause; 'but I have only regarded that as another name for misfortune. The picturesque is not the prosperous; all beggars look well on canvas, whilst Carolus Duran himself can make nothing of a portrait of Dives, *roulant carrosse* through his fifty millions.'

He had not his usual strength; his loins had had a wrench in the crashing fall from the Umbal which they had not wholly recovered, despite the wise medicaments of Greswold.

He moved with some difficulty, and, not to weary him, she remained after breakfast in the Watteau room, making him recline at length in a long chair beside one of the windows. She was touched by the weakness of a man evidently so strong and daring by nature, and she regretted the rough and inhospitable handling which he had experienced from her beloved hills and waters. She, who spoke to no one all the year through except her stewards and her priests, did not fail to be sensible of the pleasure she derived from the cultured and sympathetic companionship of a brilliant and talented mind.

'Ah! if Egon had only talent like that!' she thought, with a sigh of remembrance. Her cousin was a gallant nobleman and soldier, but of literature he had no knowledge; for art he had a consummate indifference; and the only eloquence he could command was a brief address to his troopers, which would be answered by an *Eljén*! ringing loud and long, like steel smiting upon iron.

Sabran could at all times talk well.

He had the gift of facile and eloquent words, and he had also what most attracted the sympathies of his hostess, a genuine and healthful love of the mountains and forests. All his life in Paris had not eradicated from his character a deep love for Nature in her wildest and her stormiest moods. They conversed long and with mutual pleasure of the country around them, of which she

knew every ravine and torrent, and of whose bold and sombre beauty he was honestly enamoured.

The noon had deepened into afternoon, and the chimes of the clock-tower were sounding four when he rose to take his leave, and go on his way across the green brilliancy of the tumbling water to his quiet home with the Dominican brethren. He had still the languor and fatigue about him of recent illness, and he moved slowly and with considerable weakness. She said to him in parting, with unaffected kindness, 'Come across to us whenever you like; we are concerned to think that one of our own glaciers should have treated you so cruelly. I am often out riding far and wide, but my aunt will always be pleased to receive you.'

'I am the debtor of the Umbal ice,' he said, in a low voice. 'But for that happy fall I should have gone on my way to my old senseless life without ever having known true rest as I know it yonder. Will you be offended, too, if I say that I stayed at Matrey with a vague, faint, unfounded hope that your mountains might be merciful, and let me——'

'Shoot a *kuttengeier*?' she said quickly, as though not desiring to hear his sentence finished. 'You might shoot one easily sitting at a window in the monastery, and watching till the vultures flew across the lake; but you will remember you are on parole. I am sure you will be faithful.'

Long, long afterwards she remembered that he shrank a little at the word, and that a flush of colour went over his face.

'I will,' he said simply; 'and it was not the *kuttengeier* for which I desired to be allowed to revisit Hohenszalras.'

'Well, if the monks starve you or weary you, you can remember that we are here, and you must not give their organ quite all the music that you bear so wonderfully in your mind and hands.'

'I will play to you all day, if you will only allow me.'

'Next time you come—to-morrow, if you like.'

He went away, lying listlessly in the little boat, for he was still far from strong; but life seemed to him very sweet and serene as the evening light spread over the broad, bright water, and the water birds rose and scattered before the plunge of the oars.

Had the sovereign mistress of Hohenszalras ever said before to any other living friend—to-morrow? Yet he was too clever a man to be vain; and he did not misinterpret the calm kindness of her invitation.

He went thither again the next day, though he left them early, for he had a sensitive fear of wearying with his presence ladies to whom he owed so much.

But the Princess urged his speedy return, and the châtelaine of Szaravola said once more, with that grave smile which was rather in the eyes than on the lips, 'We shall always be happy to see you when you are inclined to cross the lake.'

He was a great adept at painting, and he made several broad

bold sketches of the landscapes visible from the lake; he was famous for many a drawing *brossé dans le vrai*, which hung at his favourite club the Mirliton; he could paint, more finely and delicately also, on ivory, on satin, on leather. He sent for some fans and screens from Vienna, and did in *gouache* upon them exquisite birds, foliage, flowers, legends of saints, which were beautiful enough to be not unworthy a place in those rooms of the burg where the Penicauds, the Fragonards, the Pettitôts, were represented by much of their most perfect work.

He passed his mornings in labour of this sort; at noonday or in the afternoon he rowed across to Hohenszalras, and loitered for an hour or two in the gardens or the library. Little by little they became so accustomed to his coming that it would have seemed strange if more than a day had gone by without the little striped blue boat gliding from the Holy Isle to the castle stairs. He never stayed very long; not so long as the Princess desired.

'Never in my life have I spent weeks so harmlessly!' he said once with a smile to the doctor; then he gave a quick sigh and turned away, for he thought to himself in a sudden repentance that these innocent and blameless days were perhaps but the prelude to one of the greatest sins of a not sinless life.

He came to be looked for quite naturally at the noonday breakfast in the pretty Saxe chamber. He would spend hours playing on the chapel organ, or on the piano in the octagon room which Liszt had chosen. The grand and dreamy music rolled out over the green lake towards the green hills, and Wanda would look often at the marble figure of her brother on his tomb, lying like the statue of the young Gaston de Foix, and think to herself, 'If only Bela were listening, too!'

Sometimes she was startled when she remembered into what continual intimacy she had admitted a man of whom she had no real knowledge.

The Princess, indeed, had said to her, 'I did ask Kaulnitz: Kaulnitz knows him quite well;' but that was hardly enough to satisfy a woman as reserved in her friendships, and as habituated to the observance of a severe etiquette, as was the châtelaine of Hohenszalras. Every day almost she said to herself that she would not see him when he came, or, if she saw him, would show him, by greater chilliness of manner, that it was time he quitted the island. But when he did come, if he did not see her he went to the chapel and played a mass, a requiem, an anthem, a sonata; and Beethoven, Palestrina, Schumann, Wagner, Berlioz, surely allured her from her solitude, and she would come on to the terrace and listen to the waves of melody rolling out through the cool sunless air, through the open door of the place where her beloved dead rested. Then, as a matter of course, he stayed, and after the noonday meal sometimes he rode with her in the forests, or drove the Princess in her pony chair, or received

permission to bear his châtelaine company in her mountain walks. They were seldom alone, but they were much together.

'It is much better for her than solitude,' thought the Princess. 'It is not likely that she will ever care anything for him: she is so cold; but if she did, there would be no great harm done. He is of old blood, and she has wealth enough to need no more. Of course any one of our great princes would be better; but, then, as she will never take any one of them——'

And the Princess, who was completely fascinated by the deferential homage to her of Sabran, and the pleasure he honestly found in her society, would do all she could, in her innocent and delicate way, to give her favourite the opportunities he desired of intercourse with the mistress of Hohenszalras. She wanted to see again the life that she had seen in other days at the Schloss; grand parties for the hunting season and the summer season, royal and noble people in the guest-chambers, great gatherings for the chase on the *rond-point* in the woods, covers for fifty laid at the table in the banqueting-hall, and besides—besides, thought the childless and loving old woman—little children with long fair curls and gay voices wakening the echoes in the Rittersäal with their sports and pastimes.

It was noble and austere, no doubt, this life led by Wanda von Szalras amidst the mountains in the Tauern, but it was lonely and monotonous to the Princess, who still loved a certain movement, gossip, and diversion as she liked to nibble a *nougat* and sip her chocolate foaming under its thick cream. It seemed to her that even to suffer a little would be better for her niece than this unvarying solitude, this eternal calm. That she should have mourned for her brother was most natural, but this perpetual seclusion was an exaggeration of regret.

If the presence of Sabran reconciled her with the world, with life as it was, and induced her to return to the court and to those pleasures natural to her rank and to her years, it would be well done, thought the Princess; and as for him—if he carried away a broken heart it would be a great pity, but persons who like to move others as puppets cannot concern themselves with the accidental injury of one of their toys; and Mdme. Ottilie was too content with her success of the moment to look much beyond it.

'The charm of being here is to me precisely what I daresay makes it tiresome to you,' the mistress of Hohenszalras said to him one day; 'I mean its isolation. One can entirely forget that beyond those mountains there is a world fussing, fuming, brewing its storms in saucers, and inventing a quantity of increased unwholesomeness, in noise and stench, which it calls a higher civilisation. No! I would never have a telegraph wire brought here from Matrey. There is nothing I ever particularly care to know about. If there were any one I loved who was away from me it would be different. But there is no one. There are people I like of course——'

'But political events?' he suggested.

'They do not attract me. They are ignoble. They are for the most part contemptibly ill-managed, and to think that after so many thousands of years humanity has not really progressed beyond the wild beasts' method of settling disputes——'

'There is so much of the wild beast in it. With such an opinion of political life why do you counsel me to seek it?'

'You are a man. There is nothing else for a man who has talent, and who is—who is as you are, *désœuvré*. Intellectual work would be better, but you do not care for it, it seems. Since your "Mexico"——'

'The "Mexico" was no work of mine.'

'Oh yes, pardon me: I have read it. All your notes, all your addenda, show how the learning of the editor was even superior to that of the original author.'

'No; all that I could do was to simplify his immense erudition and arrange it. I never loved the work; do not accredit me with so much industry: but it was a debt that I paid, and paid easily too, for the materials lay all to my hand, if in disorder.'

'The Marquis Xavier must at least have infused his own love of archæology and science into you?'

'I can scarcely say even so much. I have a facility at acquiring knowledge, which is not a very high quality. Things come easily to me. I fear if Herr Joachim examined me he would find my science shallow.'

'You have so many talents that perhaps you are like one of your own Mexican forests; one luxuriance kills another.'

'Had I had fewer I might have been more useful in my generation,' he said, with a certain sincerity of regret.

'You would have been much less interesting,' she thought to herself, as she said aloud, 'There are the horses coming up to the steps: will you ride with me? And do not be ungrateful for your good gifts. Talent is a *Schlüsselblume* that opens to all hidden treasures.'

'Why are you not in the Chamber?' she had said a little before to him. 'You are eloquent; you have an ancestry that binds you to do your best for France.'

'I have no convictions,' he had said, with a flush on his face. 'It is a sad thing to confess.'

'It is; but if you have nothing better to substitute for them you might be content to abide by those of your fathers.'

He had been silent.

'Besides,' she had added, 'patriotism is not an opinion, it is an instinct.'

'With good men. I am not one of them.'

'Go into public life,' she had repeated. 'Convictions will come to you in an active career, as the muscles develop in the gymnasium.'

'I am indolent,' he had demurred, 'and I have desultory habits.

'You may break yourself of these. There must be much in which you could interest yourself. Begin with the fishing interests of the coast that belongs to you.'

'Honestly, I care for nothing except for myself. You will say it is base.'

'I am afraid it is natural.'

He but seldom spoke of his early life. When he did so it was with reluctance, as if it gave him pain. His father he had never known; of his grandfather, the Marquis Xavier, as he usually called him, he spoke with extreme and reverent tenderness, but with little reticence. The grave old man, in the stateliness and simplicity of his solitary life, had been to his youthful imagination a solemn and sacred figure.

'His was the noblest life I have ever known,' he said once, with an emotion in the accent of the words which she had never heard in his voice before, and which gave her a passing impression of a regret in him that was almost remorse.

It might be, she reflected, the remorse of a man who, in his careless youth, had been less heedful of the value of an affection and the greatness of a character which, as he grew older and wiser, he learned to appreciate when it was too late. He related willingly how the old man had trusted him to carry out into the light of the world the fruits of his life of research, and with what pleasure he had seen the instant and universal recognition of the labours of the brain and the hand that were dust. But of his own life in the West he said little; he referred his skill in riding to the wild horses of the pampas, and his botanical and scientific knowledge to the studies which the solitudes of the sierras had made him turn to as relaxation and occupation; but of himself he said little, nothing, unless the conversation so turned upon his life there that it was impossible for him to avoid those reminiscences which were evidently little agreeable to him. Perhaps she thought some youthful passion, some unwise love, had made those flowering swamps and sombre plains painful in memory to him. There might be other graves than that of the Marquis Xavier beneath the plumes of pampas grass. Perhaps, also, to a man of the world, a man of mere pleasure as he had become, that studious and lonesome youth of his already had drifted so far away that, seen in distance, it seemed dim and unreal as any dream.

'How happy you are to have so many admirable gifts!' said Wanda to him one day, when he had offered her a fan that he had painted on ivory. He had a facile skill at most of the arts, and had acquired accuracy and technique lounging through the painting-rooms of Paris. The fan was an exquisite trifle, and bore on one side her monogram and the arms of her house, and on the other mountain flowers and birds, rendered with the delicacy of a miniaturist.

'What is the use of a mere amateur?' he said with indifference. 'When one has lived amongst artists one learns heartily to despise oneself for daring to flirt with those sacred sisters the Muses.'

'Why? And, after all, when one has such perfect talent as yours, the definition of amateur and artist seems a very arbitrary and meaningless one. If you needed to make your fame and fortune by painting faces you could do so. You do not need. Does that make the fan the less precious? The more, I think, since gold cannot buy it.'

'You are too kind to me. The world would not be as much so if I really wanted its suffrages.'

'You cannot tell that. I think you have that facility which is the first note of genius. It is true all your wonderful talents seem the more wonderful to me because I have none myself. I feel art, but I have no power over it; and as for what are called accomplishments I have none. I could, perhaps, beat you in the shooting gallery, and I will try some day if you like, and I can ride—well, like my Kaiserin—but accomplishments I have none.'

'Surely you were yesterday reading Plato in his own text?'

'I learnt Greek and Latin with my brother. You cannot call that an accomplishment. The ladies of the old time often knew the learned tongues, though they were greater at tapestry or distilling and at the ordering of their household. In a solitary place like this it is needful to know so many useful things. I can shoe my horse and harness a sleigh; I can tell every useful herb and flower in the woods; I know well what to do in frostbite or accidents; if I were lost in the hills I could make my way by the stars; I can milk a cow, and can row any boat, and I can climb with crampons; I am a mountaineer. Do not be so surprised. I do all that I have the children taught in my schools. But in a salon I am useless and stupid; the last new lady whose lord has been decorated because he sold something wholesale or cheated successfully at the Bourse would, I assure you, eclipse me easily in the talents of the drawing-room.'

Sabran looked at her and laughed outright. A compliment would have seemed ridiculous before this beautiful patrician, with her serene dignity, her instinctive grace, her unconscious hauteur, her entire possession of all those attributes which are the best heirlooms of a great nobility. To protest against her words would have been like an insult to this daughter of knights and princes, to whom half the sovereigns of modern Europe would have seemed but parvenus, the accidental mushroom growth of the decay in the contest of nations.

His laughter amused her, though it was, perhaps, the most discreet and delicate of compliments. She was not offended by it as she would have been with any spoken flattery.

'After all, do not think me modest in what I have said,' she pursued. '*Talenté de société* are but slight things at the best, and

in our day need not even have either wit or culture: a good travesty at a costume-ball, a startling gown on a racecourse, a series of adventures more or less true, a trick of laughing often and laughing long—any one of these is enough for renown in your Paris. In Vienna we do more homage to tradition still; our Court life has still something of the grace of the minuet.'

'Yet even in Vienna you refuse——'

'To spend my time? Why not? The ceremonies of a Court are wearisome to me; my duties lie here; and for the mirth and pomp of society I have had no heart since the grief that you know of fell upon me.'

It was the first time that she had ever spoken of her brother's loss to him: he bowed very low in silent sympathy.

'Who would not envy his death, since it has brought such remembrance!' he said in a low tone, after some moments.

'Ah, if only we could be sure that unceasing regret consoles the dead!' she said, with an emotion that softened and dimmed all her beauty. Then, as if ashamed or repentant of having shown her feeling for Bela to a stranger, she turned to him and said more distantly:

'Would it entertain you to see my little scholars? I will take you to the schoolhouses if you like.'

He could only eagerly accept the offer: he felt his heart beat and his eyes lighten as she spoke. He knew that such a condescension in her was a mark of friendship, a sign of familiar intimacy.

'It is but a mile or so through the woods. We will walk there,' she said, as she took her tall cane from its rack and called to Neva and Donau, where they lay on the terrace without.

He fancied that the vague mistrust of him, the vague prejudice against him of which he had been sensible in her, were passing away from her mind; but still he doubted—doubted bitterly—whether she would ever give him any other thought than that due to a passing and indifferent acquaintance. That she admired his intelligence and that she pitied his loneliness he saw; but there seemed to him that never, never, never, would he break down in his own favour that impalpable but impassable barrier due, half to her pride, half to her reserve, and absolutely to her indifference, which separated Wanda von Szalras from the rest of mankind.

If she had any weakness or foible it was the children's schools on the estates in the High Tauern and elsewhere. They had been founded on a scheme of Bela's and her own, when they had been very young, and the world to them a lovely day without end. Their too elaborate theories had been of necessity curtailed, but the schools had been established on the basis of their early dreams, and were unlike any others that existed. She had read much and deeply, and had thought out all she had read, and as she enjoyed that happy power of realising and embodying her own theories

which most theorists are denied, she had founded the schools of the High Tauern in absolute opposition to all that the school-boards of her generation have decreed as desirable. And in every one of her villages she had her schools on this principle, and they throve, and the children with them. Many of these could not read a printed page, but all of them could read the shepherd's weather-glass in sky and flower; all of them knew the worm that was harmful to the crops, the beetle that was harmless in the grass; all knew a tree by a leaf, a bird by a feather, an insect by a grub.

Modern teaching makes a multitude of gabblers. She did not think it necessary for the little goatherds, and dairymaids, and foresters, and charcoal-burners, and sennerinn, and carpenters, and cobblers, to study the exact sciences or draw casts from the antique. She was of opinion, with Pope, that 'a little learning is a dangerous thing,' and that a smattering of it will easily make a man morose and discontented, whilst it takes a very deep and even life-long devotion to it to teach a man content with his lot. Genius, she thought, is too rare a thing to make it necessary to construct village schools for it, and whenever or wherever it comes upon earth it will surely be its own master.

She did not believe in culture for little peasants who have to work for their daily bread at the plough-tail or with the reaping-hook. She knew that a mere glimpse of a Canaan of art and learning is cruelty to those who never can enter into and never even can have leisure to merely gaze on it. She thought that a vast amount of useful knowledge is consigned to oblivion whilst children are taught to waste their time in picking up the crumbs of a great indigestible loaf of artificial learning. She had her scholars taught their 'A B C,' and that was all. Those who wished to write were taught, but writing was not enforced. What they were made to learn was the name and use of every plant in their own country; the habits and ways of all animals; how to cook plain food well, and make good bread; how to brew simples from the herbs of their fields and woods, and how to discern the coming weather from the aspect of the skies, the shutting-up of certain blossoms, and the time of day from those 'poor men's watches,' the opening flowers. In all countries there is a great deal of useful household and out-of-door lore that is fast being choked out of existence under books and globes, and which, unless it passes by word of mouth from generation to generation, is quickly and irrevocably lost. All this lore she had cherished by her school-children. Her boys were taught in addition any useful trade they liked—boot-making, crampon-making, horse-shoeing, wheel-making, or carpentry. His trade was made a pastime to each. The little maidens learned to sew, to cook, to spin, to card, to keep fowls and sheep and cattle in good health, and to know all poisonous plants and berries by sight.

'I think it is what is wanted,' she said. 'A little peasant child does not need to be able to talk of the corolla and the spathe, but he does want to recognise at a glance the flower that will give him healing and the berries that will give him death. His sister does not in the least require to know why a kettle boils, but she does need to know when a warm bath will be good for a sick baby or when hurtful. We want a new generation to be helpful, to have eyes, and to know the beauty of silence. I do not mind much whether my children read or not. The labourer that reads turns Socialist, because his brain cannot digest the hard mass of wonderful facts he encounters. But I believe every one of my little peasants, being wrecked like Crusoe, would prove as handy as he.'

She was fond of her scholars and proud of them, and they were never afraid of her. They knew well it was the great lady who filled all their sacks the night of Santa Claus—even those of the naughty children, because, as she said, childhood was so short that she thought it cruel to give it any disappointments.

The walk to the school-house lay through the woods to the south of the castle; woods of larch and beech and walnut and the graceful Siberian pine, with deep mosses and thick fern-brakes beneath them, and ever and again a watercourse tumbling through their greenery to fall into the Szalrassee below.

'I always fancy I can hear here the echo of the great Krimler torrents,' she said to him as they passed through the trees. 'No doubt it *is* fancy, and the sound is only from our own falls. But the peasants' tradition is, you may know, that our lake is the water of the Krimler come to us underground from the Pinzgau. Do you know our Sahara of the North? It is monotonous and barren enough, and yet with its vast solitudes of marsh and stones, its flocks of wild fowl, its reedy wastes, its countless streams, it is grand in its own way. And then in the heart of it there are the thunder and the boiling fury of Krimml! You will smile because I am an enthusiast for my country, you who have seen Orinoco and Chimborazo; but even you will own that the old Duchy of Austria, the old Archbishopric of Salzburg, the old Countship of Tirol, have some beauty and glory in them. Here is the school-house. Now you shall see what I think needful for the peasant of the future. Perhaps you will condemn me as a true Austrian: that is, as a Reactionist.'

The school-house was a châlet, or rather a collection of châlets, set one against another on a green pasture belted by pine-woods, above which the snows of the distant Venediger were gleaming amidst the clouds. There was a loud hum of childish voices rising through the open lattice, and these did not cease as they entered the foremost house.

'Do not be surprised that they take no notice of our entrance,' she said to him. 'I have taught them not to do so unless I bid

them. If they left off their tasks I could never tell how they did them; and is not the truest respect shown in obedience?'

'They are as well disciplined as soldiers,' he said with a smile, as twenty curly heads bent over desks were lifted for a moment to instantly go down again.

'Surely discipline is next to health,' added Wanda. 'If the child do not learn it early he must suffer fearfully when he reaches manhood, since all men, even princes, have to obey some time or other, and the majority of men are not princes, but are soldiers, clerks, porters, guides, labourers, tradesmen, what not; certainly something subject to law if not to a master. How many lives have been lost because a man failed to understand the meaning of immediate and unquestioning obedience! Soldiers are shot for want of it, yet children are not to be taught it!'

Whilst she spoke not a child looked up or left off his lesson: the teacher, a white-haired old man, went on with his recitation.

'Your teachers are not priests?' he said in some surprise.

'No,' she answered; 'I am a faithful daughter of the Church, as you know; but every priest is perforce a specialist, if I may be forgiven the profanity, and the teacher of children should be of perfectly open, simple, and unbiassed mind; the priest's can never be that. Besides, his teaching is apart. The love and fear of God are themes too vast and too intimate to be mingled with the pains of the alphabet and the multiplication table. There alone I agree with your French Radicals, though from a very different reason to theirs. Now in this part of the schools you see the children are learning from books. These children have wished to read, and are taught to do so; but I do not enforce though I recommend it. You think that very barbarous? Oh! reflect for a moment how much more glorious was the world, was literature itself, before printing was invented. Sometimes I think it was a book, not a fruit, that Satan gave. You smile incredulously. Well, no doubt to a Parisian it seems absurd. How should you understand what is wanted in the heart of these hills? Come and see the other houses.'

In the next which they entered there was a group of small sturdy boys, very sunburnt and rough and bright, who were seated in a row listening with rapt attention to a teacher who was talking to them of birds and their uses and ways; there were prints of birds and birds'-nests, and the teacher was making them understand why and how a bird flew.

'That is the natural history school,' she said; 'one day it is birds, another animals, another insects, that they are told about. Those are all little foresters born. They will go about their woods with eyes that see, and with tenderness for all creation.'

In the next school Herr Joachim himself, who took no notice of their entrance, was giving a simple little lecture on the useful

herbs and the edible tubers, the way to know them and to turn them to profit. There were several girls listening here.

'Those girls will not poison their people at home with a false cryptogram,' said Wanda, as they passed on to another place, where a lesson on farriery and the treatment of cattle was going on, and another where a teacher was instructing a mixed group of boys and little maidens in the lore of the forests, of the grasses, of the various causes that kill a tree in its prime, of the insects that dwell in them, and of the different soils that they needed. In another chamber there was a spinning-class and a sewing-class under a kindly-faced old dame; and in yet another there were music-classes, some playing on the zither, and others singing part-songs and glees with baby voices.

'Now you have seen all I have to show you,' said Wanda. 'In these two other châlets are the workshops, where the boys learn any trade they choose, and the girls are also taught to make a shoe or a jacket. My children would not pass examinations in cities, certainly; but they are being fitted in the best way they can for their future life, which will pass either in these mountains and forests, as I hope, or in the armies of the Emperor, and the humble work-a-day ways of poor folks everywhere. If there be a Grillparzer or a Kaulbach amongst them, the education is large and simple enough to let the originality he has been born with develop itself; if, as is far more likely, they are all made of ordinary human stuff, then the teaching they receive is such as to make them contented, pious, honest, and useful working people. At least that is what I strive for; and this is certain, that the children come some of them a German mile and more with joy and willingness to their schools, and that this at least they take away with them into their future life—the sense of duty as a supreme rein over all instincts, and mercifulness towards every living thing that God has given us.'

She had spoken with unusual animation, and with an earnestness that brought warmth over her cheek and moisture into her eyes.

Sabran looked at her timidly; then as timidly he touched the tips of her fingers, and raised them to his lips.

'You are a noble woman,' he said very low; a sense of his own utter unworthiness overwhelmed him and held him mute.

She glanced at him in some surprise, vaguely tinged with displeasure.

'There are schools on every estate,' she said, a little angrily and disconnectedly. 'These are modelled on my own whim; that is all. The world would say I ought to teach these little peasants the science that dissects its own sources, and the philosophies that resolve all creation into an egg. But I follow ancient ways enough to think the country life the best, the healthiest, the sweetest: it is for this that they are born, and to this I train

them. If we had more naturalists we should have fewer Communists.'

'Yes; Audubon would scarcely have been a regicide, or Humboldt a Camorrist,' he answered her, regaining his self-possession. 'No doubt a love of nature is a triple armour against self-love. How can I say how right I think your system with these children? You seem not to believe me. There is only one thing in which I differ with you; you think the "eyes that see" bring content. Surely not! surely not!'

'It depends on what they see,' she said, meditatively. 'When they are wide open in the woods and fields, when they have been taught to see how the tree-bee forms her cell and the mole his fortress, how the warbler builds his nest for his love and the water-spider makes his little raft, how the leaf comes forth from the hard stem and the fungi from the rank mould, then I think that sight is content—content in the simple life of the woodland place, and in such delighted wonder that the heart of its own accord goes up in peace and praise to the Creator. The printed page may teach envy, desire, covetousness, hatred; but the Book of Nature teaches resignation, hope, willingness to labour and live, submission to die. The world has gone farther and farther from peace since larger and larger have grown its cities and its shepherd kings are no more.'

He was silent.

Her voice moved him like sweet remembered music; yet in his own remembrance what were there? Only 'envy, desire, covetousness, hatred,' the unlovely shapes that were to her as emblems of the powers of evil. His reason was with her, and his emotions were with her also; but memory was busy in him, and in it he saw 'as in a glass darkly,' all his passionate, cold, embittered youth, all his warped, irresolute, useless, and untrue manhood.

'Do not think,' she added, unconscious of the pain that she had caused him, 'that I undervalue the blessing of great books; but I do think that, to recognise the beauty of literature, as much culture and comprehension are needed as to understand Leonardo's painting or the structure of Wagner's music. Those who read well are as rare as those who love well. The curse of our age is superficial knowledge; it is a cryptogram of the rankest sort, and I will not let my scholars touch it. Do you not think it is better for a country child to know what flowers are poisonous for her cattle, and what herbs are useful in her neighbours' fever, than to be able to spell through a Jesuit's newspaper, or suck evil from a Communist's pamphlet? You will not have your horse well shod if the smith be thinking of Bakounine while he hammers the iron.'

'I have held the views of Bakounine myself,' said Sabran, with hesitation. 'I do not know what you will think of me. I have even been tempted to be an anarchist, a Nihilist.'

'You speak in the past tense. You must have abandoned those views? You are received at Frohsdorf?'

'They have, perhaps, abandoned me. My life has been idle, sinful often. I have liked luxury, and have not denied myself folly. I recognised the absurdity of such a man as I was joining in any movement of seriousness and self-negation, so I threw away my political persuasions, as one throws off a knapsack when tired of a journey on foot.'

'That was not very conscientious, surely?'

'No, madame. It is perhaps, however, better than helping to adjust the contradictions of the world with dynamite. And I cannot even claim that they were persuasions; I fear they were mere personal impatience with narrow fortunes and useless ambitions.'

'I cannot pardon any one of an old nobility turning Republican; it is like a son insulting the tombs of his fathers!' she said, with emphasis; then, fearing she had reproved him too strongly, she added, with a smile, 'And yet I also could almost join the anarchists when I see the enormous wealth of baseborn speculators and Hebrew capitalists in such bitter contrast with the hunger of the poor, who starve all over the world in winter like birds frozen on the snow. Oh, do not suppose that, though I am an Austrian, I cannot see that feudalism is doomed. We are still feudal here, but then in so much we are still as we were in crusading days. The nobles have been, almost everywhere except here, ousted by capitalists, and the capitalists will in turn be devoured by the democracy. *Les loups se mangeront entre eux.* You see, though I may be prejudiced, I am not blind. But you, as a Breton, should think feudalism a loss, as I do.'

'In those days, Barbe Bleue or Gilles de Retz were the nearest neighbours of Romaris,' he said with a smile. 'Yet if feudalism could be sure of such chatêlaines as the Countess von Szalras, I would wish it back to-morrow.'

'That is very prettily put for a Socialist. But you cannot be a Socialist. You are received at Frohsdorf. Bretons are always royal; they are born with the *cultus* of God and the King.'

He laughed a little, not quite easily.

'Paris is a witch's caldron, in which all *cultes* are melted down, and evaporate in a steam of disillusion and mockery; into the caldron we have long flung, alas! cross and crown, actual and allegoric. I am not a Breton; I am that idle creation of modern life, a *boulevardier*.'

'But do you never visit Romaris?'

'Why should I? There is nothing but a few sea-tormented oaks, endless sands, endless marshes, and a dark dirty village jammed among rocks, and reeking with the smell of the oil and the fish.'

'Then I would go and make the village clean and the marshes

healthy, were I you. There must be something of interest in any people who remain natural in their ways and dwell beside a sea. Is Romaris not prosperous?'

'Prosperous! God and man have forgotten it ever since the world began, I should say. It is on a bay, so treacherous that it is called the Pool of Death. The *landes* separate it by leagues from any town. All it has to live on is the fishing. It is dull as a grave, harried by every storm, unutterably horrible.'

'Well, I would not forsake its horrors were I a son of Romaris,' she said softly; then, as she perceived that some association made the name and memory of the old Armorican village painful to him, she blew the whistle she always used, and at the summons the eldest pupil of the school, a handsome boy of fourteen, came out and stood bareheaded before her.

'Hansl, ask the teachers to grant you all an hour's frolic, that you may amuse this gentleman,' she said to him. 'And, Hansl, take care that you do your best, all of you, in dancing, wrestling, and singing, and above all with the zither, for the honour of the empire.'

The lad, with a face of sunshine, bowed low and ran into the school-houses.

'It is almost their hour for rest, or I would not have disturbed them,' she said to him. 'They come here at sunrise; bring their bread and meat, and milk is given them; they disperse according to season, a little before sunset. They have two hours' rest at different times, but it is hardly wanted, for their labours interest them, and their classes are varied.'

Soon the children all trooped out, made their bow or curtsey reverently, but without shyness, and began with song and national airs played on the zither or the 'jumping wood.' Their singing and music were tender, ardent, and yet perfectly precise. There was no false note or slurred passage. Then they danced the merry national dances that make gay the long nights in the snow-covered châlets in many a mountain village which even the mountain letter-carrier, on his climbing irons, cannot reach for months together when all the highlands are ice. They ended their dances with the Hungarian czardas, into which they threw all the vigour of their healthful young limbs and happy hearts.

'My cousin Egon taught them the czardas; have you ever seen the Magyar nobles in the madness of that dance?'

'Your cousin Egon? Do you mean Prince Vàsàrhely?'

'Yes. Do you know him?'

'I have seen him.'

His face grew paler as he spoke. He ceased to watch with interest the figures of the jumping children in their picturesque national dress, as they whirled and shouted in the sunshine on the green turf, with the woods and the rocks towering beyond them.

When the czardas was ended, the girls sat down on the sward

to rest, and the boys began their leaping, running, and stone-heaving, with their favourite wrestling at the close.

'They are as strong as chamois,' she said to him. 'There is no need here to have a gymnasium. Their mountains teach them climbing, and every Sunday on their village green their fathers make them wrestle and shoot at marks. The favourite sport here is one I will not countenance—the finger-hooking. If I gave the word any two of those little fellows would hook their middle fingers together and pull till a joint broke.'

The boys were duly commended for their skill, and Sabran would have thrown them a shower of florin notes had she allowed it. Then she bade them sing as a farewell the Kaiser's Hymn.

The grand melody rolled out on the fresh clear Alpine air in voices as fresh and as clear, that went upward and upward towards the zenith like the carol of the larks.

'I would fain be the Emperor to have that prayer sung so for me,' said Sabran, with truth, as the glad young voices dropped down into silence—the intense silence of the earth where the glaciers reign.

'He heard them last year, and he was pleased,' she said, as the children raised a loud 'Hoch!' made their reverence once more at a sign of dismissal from her, and vanished in a proud and happy crowd into the school-houses.

'Do you never praise them or reward them?' he asked in surprise.

'Santa Claus rewards them. As for praise, they know when I smile that all is well.'

'But surely they have shown very unusual musical talent?'

'They sing well because they are well taught. But they are not any of them going to become singers. Those zithers and part-songs will all serve to enliven the long nights of the farmhouse or the summer solitude of the cattle-hut. We do not cultivate music one-half enough among the peasantry. It lightens labour; it purifies and strengthens the home-life; it sweetens black-bread. Do you remember that happy picture of Jordaens' "Where the old sing, the young chirp," where the old grandfather and grandmother, and the baby in its mother's arms, and the hale five-year-old boy, and the rough servant, are all joining in the same melody, while the goat crops the vine-leaves off the table? I should like to see every cottage interior like that when the work was done. I would hang up an etching from Jordaens where you would hang up, perhaps, the programme of Proudhon.'

Then she walked back with him through the green sun-gleaming woods.

'I hope that I teach them content,' she continued. 'It is the lesson most neglected in our day. "*Niemand will ein Schuster seyn; Jederman ein Dichter.*" It is true we are very happy in our surroundings. A mountaineer's is such a beautiful life; so simple,

healthful, hardy, and fine; always face to face with nature. I try to teach them what an inestimable joy that alone is. I do not altogether believe in the prosaic views of rural life. It is true that the peasant digging his trench sees the clod, not the sky; but then when he does lift his head the sky is there, not the roof, not the ceiling. That is so much in itself. And here the sky is an everlasting grandeur: clouds and domes of snow are blent together. When the stars are out above the glaciers how serene the night is, how majestic! even the humblest creature feels lifted up into that eternal greatness. Then you think of the home-life in the long winters as dreary; but it is not so. Over away there, at Lahn, and other places on the Hallstadtersee, they do not see the sun for five months; the wall of rock behind them shuts them from all light of day; but they live together, they dance, they work. The young men recite poems, and the old men tell tales of the mountains and the French war, and they sing the homely songs of the *Schnaderhupfeln*. Then when winter passes, when the sun comes again up over the wall of rocks, when they go out into the light once more, what happiness it is! One old man said to me, "It is like being born again!" and another said, "Where it is always warm and light I doubt they forget to thank God for the sunshine;" and quite a young child said, all of his own accord, "The primroses live in the dusk all the winter, like us, and then when the sun comes up we and they run out together, and the Mother of Christ has set the waters and the little birds laughing." I would rather have the winter of Lahn than the winter of Belleville.'

'But they do go away from their mountains a good deal? One meets them——'

'My own people never do, but from the valleys around they go —yes, sometimes; but then they always come back. The Defereggenthal men, over yonder where you see those ice summits, constantly go elsewhere on reaching manhood; but as soon as they have made a little money they return to dwell at home for the remainder of their days. I think living amidst the great mountains creates a restfulness, a steadfastness in the character. If Paris were set amidst Alps you would have had Lamartine, you would not have had Rochefort.'

When she spoke thus of her own country, of her own people, all her coldness vanished, her eyes grew full of light, her reserve was broken up into animation. They were what she truly loved, what touched her affections and her sympathies.

When he heard her speak thus, he thought if any man should succeed in arousing in her the love and the loyalty that she gave her Austrian Alps, what treasures he would win, into what a kingdom he would enter! And then something that was perhaps higher than vanity and deeper than egotism stirring in him whispered, 'If any, why not you?'

Herr Joachim had at a message from her joined them. He talked of the flowers around them and of the culture and flora of Mexico. Sabran answered him with apparent interest, and with that knowledge which he had always the presence of mind to recall at need, but his heart was heavy and his mind absent.

She had spoken to him of Romaris, and he had once known Egon Vàsàrhely.

Those two facts overshadowed the sweetness and sunshine of the day; yet he knew very well that he should have been prepared for both.

The Princess Ottilie, seated in her gilt wickerwork chair under the great yew on the south side of the house, saw them approach with pleasure.

'Come and have a cup of tea,' she said to them. 'But, my beloved Wanda, you should not let the doctor walk beside you. Oh, I saw him in the distance; of course he left you before you joined *me*. He is a worthy man, a most worthy man; but so is Hubert, and you do not walk with Hubert and converse with him about flowers.'

'Are you so inexorable as to social grades, madame?' murmured Sabran, as he took his cup from her still pretty hand.

'Most certainly!' said the Princess, with a little, a very little, asperity. 'The world was much happier when distinctions and divisions were impassable. There are no sumptuary laws now. What is the consequence? That your bourgeoise ruins her husband in wearing gowns fit only for a duchess, and your prince imagines it makes him popular to look precisely like a cabman or a bailiff.'

'And even in the matter of utility,' said Sabran, who always agreed with her, 'those sumptuary laws had much in their favour. If one look through the chronicles and miniatures, say of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, how much more sensible for the change of seasons and the ease of work seems the costume of the working people! The *cotte hardie* was a thousand times more comfortable and more becoming than anything we have. If we could dress once more as all did under Louis Treize gentle and simple would alike benefit.'

'What a charmingly intelligent person he is!' thought the Princess, as she remarked that in Austria they were happier than the rest of the world: there were peasant costumes still there.

Wanda left them a little later to confer with one of her land stewards. Sabran remained seated by the Princess, in whom he felt that he possessed a friend.

'What did you think of those schools?' said Frau Ottilie. 'Oh, of course you admire and approve; you must admire and approve when they are the hobby of a beautiful woman, who is also your hostess.'

'Does that mean, Princess, that you do not?'

'No doubt the schools are excellent,' replied the Princess, in a tone which condemned them as ridiculous. 'But for my own part I prefer those things left to the Church, of which they constitute alike the privilege and the province. I cannot see either why a peasant child requires to know how a tree grows; that a merciful Providence placed it there is all he can need to be told, and that he should be able to cut it down without cutting off his own fingers is all the science that can possibly be necessary to him. However, Wanda thinks otherwise, and she is mistress here.'

'But the schools surely are eminently practical ones?'

'Practical! Is it practical to weave a romance as long as "Pamela" about the changes of a chrysalis? I fail to see it. That a grub is a destructive creature is all that any one needs to know; there is nothing practical in making it the heroine of an interminable metempsychosis. But all those ideas of Wanda's have a taint of that modern poison which her mind, though it is so strong in many things, has not been strong enough to resist. She does not believe in the efficacy of our holy relics (such as that which I sent you, and which wrought your cure), but she does believe in the fables that naturalists invent about weeds and beetles, and she finds a Kosmos in a puddle!'

'You are very severe, Princess.'

'I dislike inconsistency, and my niece is inconsistent, though she imagines that perfect consistency is the staple of her character.'

'Nay, madame, surely her character is the most evenly balanced, the most harmonious, and consequently the most perfect that is possible to humanity.'

The Princess looked at him with a keen little glance.

'You admire her very much? Are you sure you understand her?'

'I should not dare to say that, but I dare to hope it. Her nature seems to me serene and transparent as fine sunlight.'

'So it is; but she has faults, I can assure you,' said the Princess, with her curious union of shrewdness and simplicity. 'My niece is a perfectly good woman, so far as goodness is possible to finite nature; she is the best woman I have ever known out of the cloister. But then there is this to be said—she has never been tempted. True, she might be tempted to be arrogant, despotic, tyrannical; and she is not so. But that is not precisely the temptation to try her. She is mild and merciful out of her very pride; but her character would be sure destruction of her pride were such a thing possible. You think she is not proud because she is so gentle? You might as well say that Her Majesty is not Empress because she washes the feet of the twelve poor men! Wanda is the best woman that I know, but she is also the proudest.'

'The Countess has never loved any one?' said Sabran, who grew paler as he heard.

'Terrestrial love—no. It has not touched her. But it would not alter her, believe me. Some women lose themselves in their affections; she would not. She would always remain the mistress of it, and it would be a love like her character. Of that I am sure.'

Sabran was silent; he was discouraged.

'I think the boldest man would always be held at a distance from her,' he said, after a pause. 'I think none would ever acquire dominion over her life.'

'That is exactly what I have said,' replied the Princess. 'Your phrase is differently worded, but it comes to the same thing.'

'It would depend very much——'

'On what?'

'On how much she loved, and perhaps a little on how much she was loved.'

'Not at all,' said the Princess, decidedly; 'you cannot get more out of a nature than there is in it, and there is no sort of passion in the nature of my niece.'

He was silent again.

'She was admirably educated,' added the Princess, hastily, conscious of a remark not strictly becoming in herself; 'and her rare temperament is serene, well balanced, void of all excess. Heaven has mercifully eliminated from her almost all mortal errors.'

'By pride
Angels have fallen ere thy time!'

suggested Sabran.

'Angels, perhaps,' said the Princess, drily. 'But for women it is an admirable preservative, second only to piety.'

He went home sculling himself across the lake, now perfectly calm beneath the rose and gold of a midsummer sunset. His heart was heavy, and a dull fear seemed to beat at his conscience like a child suddenly awaking who knocks at a long-closed door. Still, as a crime allures men who contemplate it by the fascination of its weird power, so the sin he desired to commit held him with its unholy beguilement, and almost it looked holy to him because it wore the guise of Wanda von Szalras.

He was not insensible to the charm of this interchange of thought. He had had many passions in which his senses alone had been enlisted. There was a more delicate attraction in the gradual and numberless steps by which, only slowly and with patience, could he win any way into her regard. She had for him the puissance that the almost unattainable has for all humanity. When he could feel that he had awakened any sympathy in her, his pride was more flattered than it could have been by the most complete subjection of any other woman. He had looked on all women with the chill, amorous cynicism of the Parisian psychology,

as *l'éternel féminin*, at best as '*la forme perverse, vaporeuse, langoureuse, souple comme les roseaux, blanche comme les lis, incapable de se mouvoir pendant les deux tiers du jour—sans équilibre, sans but, sans équateur, donnant son corps en pâture à sa tête.*' He had had no other ideal; no other conception. This psychology, like some other sciences, brutalises as it equalises. In the woman who had risen up before him in the night of storm upon the Szalrassee he had recognised with his intelligence a woman who made his philosophy at fault, who aroused something beyond his mere instincts, who was not to be classified with the Lias, or the Cesarines, or the Jane de Simeroses, who had been in his love, as in his literature, the various types of the *éternel féminin*. The simplicity and the dignity of her life astonished and convinced him; he began to understand that where he had imagined he had studied the universe in his knowledge of women, he had in reality only seen two phases of it—the hothouse and the ditch. It is a common error to take the forced flower and the slime weed, and think that there is nothing between or beyond the two.

He had the convictions of his school that all women were at heart coquettes or hypocrites, consciously or unconsciously. Wanda von Szalras routed all his theories. Before her candour, her directness and gravity of thought, her serene indifference to all forms of compliment, all his doctrines and all his experiences were useless. She inspired him with reverential and hopeless admiration, which was mingled with an angry astonishment, and something of the bitterness of envy. Sometimes, as he sat and watched the green water of the lake tumble and roll beneath a north wind's wrath under a cloudy sky which hid the snows of the Glöckner range, he remembered a horrible story that had once fascinated him of Malatesta of Rimini slaying the princess that would have none of his love, striking his sword across her white throat in the dusky evening time, and casting her body upon the silken curtains of her wicked litter. Almost he could have found it in him to do such a crime—almost. Only he thought that at one look of her eyes his sword would have dropped upon the dust.

Her personal beauty had inspired him with a sudden passion, but her character checked it with the sense of fear which it imposed on him; fear of those high and blameless instincts which were an integral part of her nature, fear of that frank, unswerving truth which was the paramount law of her life. As he rode with her, walked with her, conversed with her in the long, light summer hours, he saw more and more of the purity and nobility of her temper, but he saw or thought he saw also an inexorable pride and a sternness in judgment which made him believe that she would be utterly unforgiving to weakness or to sin.

She remained the Nibelungen Queen to him, clothed in flawless armour and aloof from men.

He lingered on at the Holy Isle, finding a fresh charm each

day in this simple and peaceful existence, filled with the dreams of a woman unlike every other he had known. He knew that it could not last, but he was unwilling to end it himself. To rise to the sound of the monks' matins, to pass his forenoons in art or open-air exercise, to be sure that some hour or another before sunset he would meet her, either in her home or abroad in the woods; to go early to bed, seeing, as he lay, the pile of the great burg looming high above the water, like the citadel of the Sleeping Beauty—all this, together making up an existence so monotonous, harmless, and calm that a few months before he would have deemed it impossible to endure it, was soothing, alluring, and beguiling to him. He had told no one where he was; his letters might lie and accumulate by the hundred in his rooms in Paris for aught that he cared; he had no creditors, for he had been always scrupulously careful to avoid all debt, and he had no friend for whose existence he cared a straw. There were those who cared for him, indeed, but these seldom trouble any man very greatly.

In the last week of August, however, a letter found its way to him; it was written in a very bad hand, on paper gorgeous with gold and silver. It was signed 'Cochonette.'

It contained a torrent of reproaches made in the broadest language that the slang of the hour furnished, and every third word was misspelt. How the writer had tracked him she did not say. He tore the letter up and threw the pieces into the water flowing beneath his window. Had he ever passionately desired and triumphed in the possession of that woman? It seemed wonderful to him now. She was an idol of Paris; a creature with the voice of a lark and the laugh of a child, with a lovely, mutinous face, and eyes that could speak without words. As a pierrot, as a mousquetaire, as a little prince, as a fairy king of operetta, she had no rival in the eyes of Paris. She blazed with jewels when she played a peasant, and she wore the costliest costume of Felix's devising when she sung her triplets as a soubrette. She had been constant to no one for three months, and she had been constant to him for three years, or, at the least, had made him believe so; and she wrote to him now furiously, reproachfully, entreatingly—fierce reproaches and entreaties, all misspelt.

The letter which he threw into the lake brought all the memories of his old life before him; it was like the flavour of absinthe after drinking spring water. It was a life which had had its successes, a life, as the world called it, of pleasure; and it seemed utterly senseless to him now as he tore up the note of Cochonette, and looked down the water to where the towers and spires and battlements of Hohenszalras soared upward in the mists. He shook himself as though to shake off the memory of an unpleasant dream as he went out, descended the landing steps, drew his boat from under the willows, and sculled himself across

towards the water-stairs of the Schloss. In a quarter of an hour he was playing the themes of the 'Gotterdammerung,' whilst his châtelaine sat at her spinning-wheel a few yards from him.

'Good heavens! can she and Cochonette belong to the same human race?' he thought, as whilst he played his glance wandered to that patrician figure seated in the light from the oriel window, with the white hound leaning against her velvet skirts, and her jewelled fingers plying the distaff and disentangling the flax.

After the noonday breakfast the sun shone, the mists lifted from the water, the clouds drifted from the lower mountains, only leaving the snow-capped head of the Glöckner enveloped in them.

'I am going to ride; will you come?' said Wanda von Szalras to him. He assented with ardour, and a hunter, Siegfried, the mount which was always given to him, was led round under the great terrace, in company with her Arab riding-horse Ali. They rode far through the forests and out on the one level road there was, which swept round the south side of the lake; a road, turf-bordered, overhung with huge trees, closed in with a dewy veil of greenery, across which ever and anon some flash of falling water or some shimmer of glacier or of snow crest shone through the dense leafage. They rode too fast for conversation, both the horses racing like greyhounds; but as they returned, towards the close of the afternoon, they slackened their pace in pity to the steaming, heaving flanks beneath their saddles, and then they could hear each other's voices.

'What a lovely life it is here!' he said, with a sigh. 'The world will seem very vulgar and noisy to me after it.'

'You would soon tire, and wish for the world,' she answered him.

'No,' he said quickly; 'I have been two months on the Holy Isle, and I have not known weariness for a moment.'

'That is because it is still summer. If you were here in the winter you would bemoan your imprisonment, like my Aunt Ottilie. Even the post sometimes fails us.'

'I should not lament the post,' he replied, thinking of the letter he had cast into the lake. 'My old life seems to me insanity, fever, disease, beside these past two months I have spent with the monks.'

'You can take the vows,' she suggested with a smile. He smiled too.

'Nay; I should not dare to so insult our Mother Church. One must not empty ashes into a reliquary.'

'Your life is not ashes yet.'

He was silent. He could not say to her what he would have said could he have laid his heart bare.

'When you go away,' she pursued, 'remember my words. Choose some career; make yourself some aim in life; do not fold

your talents in a napkin—in a napkin that lies on the supper table at Bignon's. That idle, aimless life is very attractive, I dare say, in its way, but it must grow wearisome and unsatisfactory as years roll on. The men of my house have never been content with it; they have always been soldiers, statesmen, something or other beside mere nobles.'

'But they have had a great position.'

'Men make their own position; they cannot make a name (at least, not to my thinking). You have that good fortune; you have a great name; you only need, pardon me, to make your manner of life worthy of it.'

He grew pale as she spoke.

'Cannot make a name?' he said, with forced gaiety. 'Surely in these days the beggar rides on horseback in all the ministries and half the nobilities!'

A great contempt passed over her face. 'You mean that Hans, Pierre, or Richard becomes a count, an excellency, or an earl? What does that change? It alters the handle; it does not alter the saucepan. No one can be ennobled. Blood is blood; nobility can only be inherited; it cannot be conferred by all the heralds in the world. The very meaning and essence of nobility are descent, inherited traditions, instincts, habits, and memories—all that is meant by *noblesse oblige*.'

'Would you allow,' thought her companion, 'would you allow the same nobility to Falconbridge as to Plantagenet?'

But he dared not name the bar sinister to this daughter of princes.

Siegfried started and reared: his rider did not reply, being absorbed in calming him.

'What frightened him?' she asked.

'A hawk flew by,' said Sabran.

'A hawk, flying low enough for a horse to see it? It must be wounded.'

He did not answer, and they quickened their pace, as the sun sunk behind the glaciers of the west.

When he returned to the monastery the evening had closed in; the lantern was lit at his boat's prow. Dinner was prepared for him, but he ate little. Later the moon rose; golden and round as a bowl. It was a beautiful spectacle as it gave its light to the amphitheatre of the mountains, to the rippling surface of the lake, to the stately, irregular lines of the castle backed by the blackness of its woods. He sat long by the open window lost in thought, pondering on the great race which had ruled there. *L'honneur parle: il suffit*, had been their law, and she who represented them held a creed no less stern and pure than theirs. Her words spoken in their ride were like a weight of ice on his heart. Never to her, never, could he confess the errors of his past. He was a man bold to temerity, but he was not bold enough to risk

the contempt of Wanda von Szalras. He had never much heeded right or wrong, or much believed in such ethical distinctions, only adhering to the conventional honour and good breeding of the world, but before her his moral sense awakened.

'The Marquis Xavier would bid me go from here,' he thought to himself, as the night wore on and he heard the footfall of the monks passing down the passages to their midnight orisons.

'After all these years in the *pourriture* of Paris, have I such a thing as conscience left?' he asked his own thoughts, bitterly. The moon passed behind a cloud and darkness fell over the lake and hid the great pile of the Hohenszalrasburg from his sight. He closed the casement and turned away. 'Farewell!' he said, to the vanished castle.

'Will you think of me sometimes,' dear Princess, when I am far away?' said Sabran abruptly the next morning to his best friend, who looked up startled.

'Away? Are you going away?'

'Yes,' said Sabran, abruptly; 'and you, I think, Madame, who have been so good to me, can guess easily why.'

'You love my niece?'

He inclined his head in silence.

'It is very natural,' said the Princess, faintly. 'Wanda is a beautiful woman; many men have loved her; they might as well have loved that glacier yonder.'

'It is not that,' said Sabran, hastily. 'It is my own poverty——'

The Princess looked at him keenly.

'Do you think her not cold?'

'She who can so love a brother would surely love her lover not less, did she stoop to one,' he replied, evasively. 'At least I think so; I ought not to presume to judge.'

'And you care for her?' The glance her eyes gave him added as plainly as words could have done, 'It is not only her wealth, her position? Are you sure?'

He coloured very much as he answered quickly: 'Were she beggared to-morrow, you would see.'

'It is a pity,' murmured the Princess. He did not ask her what she regretted; he knew her sympathy was with him.

They were both mute. The Princess pushed the end of her cane thoughtfully into the velvet turf. She hesitated some moments, then said in a low voice: 'Were I you I would stay.'

'Do not tempt me! I have stayed too long as it is. What can she think of me?'

'She does not think about your reasons; she is too proud a woman to be vain. In a measure you have won her friendship. Perhaps—I do not know, I have no grounds to say so—but perhaps in time you might win more.'

She looked at him as she concluded. He grew exceedingly pale.

He stooped over her chair, and spoke very low:

'It is just because that appears possible that I go. Do not misunderstand me, I am not a coxcomb; *je ne me pose pas en vainqueur*. But I have no place here, since I have no equality with her from which to be able to say "I love you!" Absence alone can say it for me without offence as without hope.'

The Princess was silent. She was thinking of the maxim, '*L'absence éteint les petites passions et allume les grandes.*' Which was his?

'You have been so good to me,' he murmured caressingly, 'so benevolent, so merciful, I dare to ask of you a greater kindness yet. Will you explain for me to the Countess von Szalras that I am called away suddenly, and make my excuses and my farewell? It will save me much fruitless pain.'

'And if it give her pain?'

'I cannot suppose that, and I should not dare to hope it.'

'I have no reason to suppose it either, but I think you are *de guerre las* before the battle is decided.'

'There is no battle possible for me. There is only a quite certain dishonour.'

His face was dark and weary. He spoke low and with effort. She glanced at him, and felt the vague awe with which strong unintelligible emotion always filled her.

'You must judge the question for yourself,' she said with a little hesitation. 'I will express what you wish to my niece if you really desire it.'

'You are always so good to me,' he murmured, with some agitation, and he bent down before her and reverently kissed her little white hands.

'God be with you, sir,' she said, with tears in her own tender eyes.

'You have been so good to me,' he murmured; 'the purest hours of my worthless life have been spent at Hohenszalras. Here only have I known what peace and holiness can mean. Give me your blessing ere I go.'

In another moment he had bowed himself from her presence, and the Princess sat mute and motionless in the sun. When she looked up at the great feudal pile of the Schloss which towered above her, it was with reproach and aversion to that stone emblem of the great possessions of its châtelaine.

'If she were a humbler woman,' she thought, 'how much happier she would be! What a pity it all is—what a pity! Of course he is right; of course he can do nothing else. If he did do anything else the world would condemn him, and even she very likely would despise him—but it is such a pity! If only she could have a woman's natural life about her—— This life is not good.

It is very well while she is young, but when she shall be no longer young?'

And the tender heart of the old gentlewoman ached for a sorrow not her own; and could she have given him a duchy to make him able to declare his love, she would have done so at all costs.

CHAPTER VII.

THE sun was setting when the Countess Wanda returned from her distant ride. She dismounted at the foot of the terrace-steps and ascended them slowly, with Donau and Neva behind her, both tired and breathless.

'You are safe home, my love?' said the Princess, turning her head towards the steps.

'Yes, dear mother mine; you always, I know, think that Death gets up on the saddle. Is anything amiss? You look troubled.'

'I have a message for you,' said the Princess with a sigh, and she gave Sabran's.

Wanda von Szalras heard in silence. She showed neither surprise nor regret.

The Princess waited a little.

'Well,' she said, at length, 'well, you do not even ask me why he goes!'

'You say he has been called away,' her niece answered. 'Surely that is reason enough.'

'You have no heart, Wanda.'

'I do not understand you,' said the Countess von Szalras, very coldly.

'Do you mean to say you have not seen that he loved you?'

The face of Wanda grew colder still.

'Did he instruct you to say this also?'

'No, no,' said the Princess, hurriedly, perceiving her error. 'He only bade me say that he was called away and must leave at once, and begged you to accept through me his adieus and the expression of his gratitude. But it is very certain that he does love you, and that because he is too poor and too proud to say so he goes.'

'You must weave your little romance!' said her niece, with some impatience, striking the gilt wicker table with her riding-whip. 'I prefer to think that M. de Sabran is, very naturally, gone back to the world to which he belongs. My only wonder has been that he has borne so long with the solitudes of the Szalrassee.'

'If you were not the most sincere woman in the world, I

should believe you were endeavouring to deceive me. As it is,' said the Princess, with some temper, 'I can only suppose that you deceive yourself.'

'Have you any tea there?' said her niece, laying aside her gauntlets and her whip, and casting some cakes to the two hounds.

She had very plainly and resolutely closed the subject almost before it was fairly opened. The Princess, a little intimidated and keenly disappointed, did not venture to renew it.

When, the next morning, questioning Hubert, the Princess found that indeed her favourite had left the island monastery at dawn, the landscape of the Hohe Tauern seemed to her more monotonous and melancholy than it had ever done, and the days more tedious and dull.

'You will miss the music, at least,' she said, with asperity, to her niece. 'I suppose you will give him as much regret as you have done at times to the Abbé Liszt?'

'I shall miss the music, certainly,' said the Countess Wanda, calmly. 'Our poor Kapellmeister is very indifferent. If he were not so old that it would be cruel to displace him, I would take another from the Conservatorium.'

The Princess was irritated and even incensed at the reply, but she let it pass. Sabran's name was mentioned no more between them for many days.

No one knew whither he had gone, and no tidings came of him to Hohenszalras.

One day a foreign journal, amongst the many news-sheets that came by post there, contained his name: 'The Marquis de Sabran broke the bank at Monte Carlo yesterday,' was all that it said in its news of the Riviera.

'A winner at a *tripot*, what a hero for you, mother mine!' she said with some bitterness, handing the paper to the Princess. She was surprised at the disgust and impatience which she felt herself. What could it concern her?

That day as she rode slowly through the grass drives of her forests, she thought with pain of her companion of a few weeks, who so late had ridden over these very paths beside her, the dogs racing before them, the wild flowers scenting the air, the pale sunshine falling down across the glossy necks of their horses.

'He ought to do better things than break a bank at a gaming-place,' she thought with regret. 'With such natural gifts of body and mind, it is a sin—a sin against himself and others—to waste his years in those base and trivial follies. When he was here he seemed to feel so keenly the charm of Nature, the beauty of repose, the possibility of noble effort.'

She let the reins droop on her mare's throat and paced slowly over the moss and the grass; though she was all alone—for in her own forests she would not be accompanied even by a groom—the

colour came into her face as she remembered many things, many words, many looks, which confirmed the assertion Madame Ottilie had made to her.

'That may very well be,' she thought; 'but if it be, I think my memory might have restrained him from becoming the hero of a gambling apotheosis.

And she was astonished at herself to find how much regret mingled with her disgust, and how much her disgust was intensified by a sentiment of personal offence.

When she reached home it was twilight, and she was told that her cousin Prince Egon Vàsàrhely had arrived. She would have been perfectly glad to see him, if she had been perfectly sure that he would have accepted quietly the reply she had sent to his letter received on the night of the great storm. As it was she met him in the blue-room before the Princess Ottilie, and nothing could be said on that subject.

Prince Egon, though still young, had already a glorious past behind him. He came of a race of warriors, and the Vàsàrhely Hussars had been famous since the days of Maria Theresa. The command of that brilliant regiment was hereditary, and he had led them in repeated charges into the French lines and the Prussian lines with such headlong and dauntless gallantry that he had been called the 'Wild Boar of Taròc' throughout the army. His hussars were the most splendid cavalry that ever shook their bridles in the sunlight on the wide Magyar plains. Their uniform remained the same as in the days of Aspern, and he was prodigal of gold, and embroidery, and rich furs, and trappings, with that martial coquetry which has been characteristic of so many great soldiers from Scylla to Michael Skobeleff.

With his regiment in the field, and without it in many adventures in the wilder parts of the Austrian Empire and on the Turkish border, he had become a synonym for heroism throughout the Imperial army, whilst in his manner and mode of life no more magnificent noble ever came from the dim romantic solitudes of Hungary to the court and the capital. He had great personal beauty; he had unrivalled traditions of valour: and he had a character as generous as it was daring: but he failed to awaken more than a sisterly attachment in the heart of his cousin. She had been so used to see him with her brothers that he seemed as near to her as they had been. She loved him tenderly, but with no sort of passion. She wondered that he should care for her in that sense, and grew sometimes impatient of his reiterated prayers.

'There are so many women who would listen to him and adore him,' she said. 'Why must he come to me?'

Before Bela's death, and before she became her own mistress, she had always urged that her own sisterly affection for Egon made any thought of marriage with him out of the question.

'I am fond of him as I was of Gela and Victor,' she said often

to those who pressed the alliance upon her; 'but that is not love. I will not marry a man whom I do not love.'

When she became absolutely her own mistress he was for some time silent, fearing to importune her, or to seem mercenary. She had become by Bela's death one of the greatest alliances in Europe. But at length, confident that his own position exempted him from any possible appearance of covetousness, he gently reminded her of her father's and her brother's wishes; but to no effect. She gave him the same answer. 'You are sure of my affection, but I will not do you so bad a service as to become your wife. I have no love for you.' From that he had no power to move or change her. He had made her many appeals in his frequent visits to Hohenszalras, but none with any success in inducing her to depart from the frank and placid regard of close relationship. She liked him well, and held him in high esteem; but this was not love; nor, had she consented to call it love, would it ever have contented the impetuous, ardent, and passionate spirit of Egon Vàsàrhely.

They could not be lovers, but they still remained friends, partly through consanguinity, partly because he could bear to see her thus so long as no other was nearer to her than he. They greeted each other now cordially and simply, and talked of the many cares and duties and interests that sprang up daily in the administration of such vast properties as theirs.

Prince Vàsàrhely, though a brilliant soldier and magnificent noble, was simple in his tastes, and occupied himself largely with the welfare of his people.

The Princess yawned discreetly behind her fan many times during this conversation, to her utterly uninteresting, upon villages, vines, harvests, bridges swept away by floods, stewards just and unjust, and the tolls and general navigation of the Danube. Quite tired of all these details and discussion of subjects which she considered ought to be abandoned to the men of business, she said suddenly, in a pause:

'Egon, did you ever know a very charming person, the Marquis de Sabran?'

Vàsàrhely reflected a moment.

'No,' he answered slowly. 'I have no recollection of such a name.'

'I thought you might have met him in Paris.'

'I am so rarely in Paris; since my father's death I have scarcely passed a month there. Who is he?'

'A stranger whose acquaintance we made through his being cast adrift here in a storm,' said the Countess Wanda, with some impatience. 'My dear aunt is devoted to him, because he has painted her a St. Ottilie on a screen, with the skill of Meissonnier. Since he left us he has become celebrated: he has broken the bank at Monte Carlo.'

Egon Vàsàrhely looked at her quickly.

'It seems to anger you? Did this stranger stay here any time?'

'Some time, yes; he had a bad accident on the Venediger. Herr Greswold brought him to our island to pass his convalescence with the monks. From the monks to Monte Carlo!—it is at least a leap requiring some elasticity in moral gymnastics.'

She spoke with some irritation, which did not escape the ear of her cousin. He said merely himself:

'Did you receive him, knowing nothing about him?'

'We certainly did. It was an imprudence; but if he paint like Meissonnier, he plays like Liszt: who was to resist such a combination of gifts?'

'You say that very contemptuously, Wanda,' said the Prince.

'I am not contemptuous of the talent; I am of the possessor of it, who comprehends his own powers so little that he breaks the bank at Monaco.'

'I envy him at least his power to anger you,' said Egon Vàsàrhely.

'I am angered to see anything wasted,' she answered, conscious of the impatience she had shown. 'I was very angry with Otto's little daughter yesterday; she had gathered a huge bundle of cowslips and thrown it down in the sun; it was ingratitude to God who made them. This friend of my aunt's does worse; he changes his cowslip into monkshood.'

'Is he indeed such a favourite of yours, dear mother?' said Vàsàrhely.

The Princess answered petulantly:

'Certainly, a charming person. And our cousin Kaulnitz knows him well. Wanda for once talks foolishly. Gambling is, it is true, a great sin at all times, but I do not know that it is worse at public tables than it is in your clubs. I myself am, of course, ignorant of these matters; but I have heard that privately, at cards, whole fortunes have been lost in a night, scribbled away with a pencil on a scrap of paper.'

'To lose a fortune is better than to win one,' said her niece, as she rose from the head of her table.

When the Princess slept in her blue-room Egon Vàsàrhely approached his cousin, where she sat at her embroidery frame.

'This stranger has the power to make you angry,' he said sadly. 'I have not even that.'

'Dear Egon,' she said tenderly, 'you have done nothing in your life that I could despise. Why should you be discontented at that?'

'Would you care if I did?'

'Certainly; I should be very sorry if my noble cousin did anything that could belie his chivalry; but why should we suppose impossibilities?'

'Suppose we were not cousins, would you love me then?'

'How can I tell? This is mere nonsense——'

'No; it is all my life. You know, Wanda, that I have loved you, only you, ever since I saw you as I came back from France—a child, but such a beautiful child, with your hair braided with pearls, and a dress all stiff with gold, and your lap full of red roses.'

'Oh, I remember,' she said hastily. 'There was a child's costume ball at the Hof; I called myself Elizabeth of Thuringia, and Bela, my own Bela, was my little Louis of Hungary. Oh, Egon, why will you speak of those times?'

'Because surely they make a kind of tie between us? They——'

'They do make one that will last all our lives, unless you strain it to bear a weight it is not made to bear. Dear Egon, you are very dear to me, but not dear *so*. As my cousin, my gallant, kind, and loyal cousin, you are very precious to me; but, Egon, if you could force me to be your wife I should not be indifferent to you, I should hate you!'

He grew white under his olive skin. He shrank a little, as if he suffered some sharp physical pain.

'Hate me!' he echoed in a stupor of surprise and suffering.

'I believe I should. I *could* hate. It is a frightful thing to say. Dear Egon, look elsewhere; find some other amongst the many lovely women that you see; do not waste your brilliant life on me. I shall never say otherwise than I say to-night, and you will compel me to lose the most trusted friend I have.'

He was still very pale. He breathed heavily. There was a mist over his handsome dark eyes, which were cast down. 'Until you love any other, I shall never abandon hope.'

'That is unwise. I shall probably love no one all my life long; I have told you so often.'

'All say so until love finds them out. I will not trouble you; I will be your cousin, your friend, rather than be nothing to you. But it is hard.'

'Why think of me so? Your career has so much brilliancy, so many charms, so many interests——'

'You do not know what it is to love. I talk to you in an unknown tongue, and you have no pity, because you do not understand.'

She did not answer. Over her thoughts passed the memory of the spinet whose music she had said he could not touch and waken.

He remained a week at Hohenzalras, but he did not again speak to her of his own sufferings. He was a proud man, though humble to her.

With a sort of contrition she noticed for the first time that he wearied her; that when he spoke of his departure she was glad. He was a fine soldier a keen hunter, rather than a man of talents,

The life he loved best was his life at home in his great castles, admidst the immense plains and the primeval forests of Hungary and the lonely fastnesses of the Karpathians, or scouring a field of battle with his splendid troopers behind him, all of them his kith and kin, or men of his own soil, whom he ruled with a firm, high hand, in a generous despotism.

When he was with her she missed all the graceful tact, the subtle meanings, the varied suggestions and allusions that had made the companionship of Sabran so welcome to her. Egon Vàsàrhely was no scholar, no thinker, no satirist; he was only brave and generous, as lions are, and, vaguely, a poet without words, from the wild solitudes he loved, and the romance that lies in the nature of the Magyar. 'He knows nothing!' she thought, impatiently recalling the stores of most various and recondite knowledge with which her late companion had played so carelessly and with such ease. It seemed to her that never in her life had she weighed her cousin in scales so severe and found him so utterly wanting.

And yet how many others she knew would have found their ideal in that gallant gentleman, with his prowess, and his hardihood, and his gallantry in war, and his winsome temper, so full of fire to men, so full of chivalry for women! When Prince Egon, in his glittering dress, all fur and gold velvet, passed up the ball-room at the Burg in Vienna, no other man in all that magnificent assembly was so watched, so admired, so sighed for: and he was her cousin, and he only wearied her!

As he was leaving, he paused a moment after bidding her farewell, and after some moments of silence, said in a low voice:

'Dear, I will not trouble you again until you summon me. Perhaps that will be many years; but whether we meet or not, time will make no change in me. I am your servant ever.'

Then he bowed over her hand once more, once more saluted her, and in a moment or two the quick trot of the horses that bore him away woke the echoes of the green hills.

She looked out of the huge arched entrance door down the green defile that led to the outer world, and felt a pang of self-reproach, of self-condemnation.

'If one could force oneself to love by any pilgrimage or penance,' she thought, 'there are none I would not take upon me to be able to love Egon.'

As she stood thoughtfully there on the doorway of her great castle, the sweet linnet-like voice of the Princess Ottilie came on her ear. It said, a little shrilly: 'You are always looking for a four-leaved shamrock. In that sort of search life slips away unperceived; one is very soon left alone with one's dead leaves.'

Wanda von Szalras turned and smiled.

'I am not afraid of being left alone,' she said. 'I shall have my people and my forests always.'

Then, apprehensive lest she should have seemed thankless and cold of heart, she turned caressingly to Madame Ottilie.

'Nay, I could not bear to lose you, my sweet fairy godmother. Think me neither forgetful nor ungrateful.'

'You could never be one or the other to me. But I shall not live, like a fairy godmother, for ever. Before I die I would fain see you content like others with the shamrocks as nature has made them.'

'I think there are few people as content as I am,' said the Countess Wanda, and said the truth.

'You are content with yourself, not with others. You will pardon me if I say there is a great difference between the two,' replied the Princess Ottilie, with a little smile that was almost sarcastic on her pretty small features.

'You mean that I have a great deal of vanity and no sympathy?'

'You have a great deal of pride,' said the Princess, discreetly, as she began to take her customary noontide walk up and down the terrace, her tall cane tapping the stones and her little dog running before her, whilst a hood of point-lace and a sunshade of satin kept the wind from her pretty white hair and the sun from her eyes, that were still blue as the acres of mouse-ear that grew by the lake.

CHAPTER VIII.

The summer glided away and became autumn, and the Countess Wanda refused obstinately to fill Hohenszalras with house-parties. In vain her aunt spoke of the Lynau, the Windischgrätz, the Hohenlöhe, and the other great families who were their relatives or their friends. In vain she referred continually to the fact that every Schloss in Austria and all adjacent countries was filling with guests at this season, and the woods around it resounding with the hunter's horn and the hound's bay. In vain did she recapitulate the glories of Hohenszalras in an earlier time, and hint that the mistress of so vast a domain owed some duties to society.

Wanda von Szalras opposed to all these suggestions and declarations that indifference which would have seemed obstinacy had it been less mild. As for the hunting parties, she avowed with truth that although a daughter of mighty hunters, she herself regarded all pastimes founded on cruelty with aversion and contempt; the bears and the boars, the wild deer and the mountain chamois, might dwell undisturbed for the whole of their lives so far as she was concerned. When a bear came down and ate off the heads of an acre or two of wheat, she recompensed the peasant who had suffered the loss, but she would not have her *jägermeister*

track the poor beast. The *jägermeister* sighed as Madame Ottilie did for the bygone times when a score of princes and nobles had ridden out on a wolf-chase, or hundreds of peasants had threshed the woods to drive the big game towards the Kaiser's rifle; but for poachers his place would have been a sinecure and his days a weariness. His mistress was not to be persuaded. She preferred her forests left to their unbroken peace, their stillness filled with the sounds of rushing waters and the calls of birds.

The weeks glided on one after one with the even measured pace of monotonous and unruffled time; her hours were never unoccupied, for her duties were constant and numerous.

She would go and visit the sennerinn in their loftiest cattle-huts, and would descend an ice-slope with the swiftness and security of a practised mountaineer. In her childhood she and Bela had gone almost everywhere the chamois went, and she came of a race which, joined to high courage, had the hereditary habits of a great endurance. In the throne-room of Vienna, with her great pearls about her, that had once been sent by a Sultan to a Szalras who fought with Wenceslaus, she was the stateliest and proudest lady of the greatest aristocracy of the world: but on her own mountain sides she was as dauntless as an ibis, as sure-footed as a goat, and would sit in the alpine cabins and drink a draught of milk and break a crust of rye-bread as willingly as though she were a sennerinn herself; so she would take the oars and row herself unaided down the lake, so she would saddle her horse and ride it over the wildest country, so she would drive her sledge over many a German mile of snow, and even in the teeth of a north wind blowing straight from the Russian plains and the Arctic seas.

'Fear nothing!' had been said again and again to her in her childhood, and she had learned that her race transmitted to and imposed its courage no less on its daughters than on its sons. Cato would have admired this mountain brood, even though its mountain lair was more luxurious than he would have deemed was wise.

She knew thoroughly what all her rights, titles, and possessions were. She was never vague or uncertain as to any of her affairs, and it would have been impossible to deceive or to cheat her. No one tried to do so, for her lawyers were men of old-fashioned ways and high repute, and for centuries the vast properties of the Counts von Szalras had been administered wisely and honestly in the same advocates' offices, which were close underneath the Calvarienburg in the good city of Salzburg. Her trustees were her uncle Cardinal Vàsârhely and her great-uncle Prince George of Lilienhöhe; they were old men, both devoted to her, and both fully conscious that her intelligence was much abler and keener than their own. All these vast possessions gave her an infinite variety of occupation and of interests, and she neglected

none of them. Still, all the properties and duties in the world will not suffice to fill up the heart and mind of a woman of four-and-twenty years of age, who enjoys the perfection of bodily health and of physical beauty. The most spiritual and the most dutiful of characters cannot altogether resist the impulses of nature. There were times when she now began to think that her life was somewhat empty and passionless.

But a certain sense of their monotony had begun for the first time to come upon her; a certain vague dissatisfaction stirred in her now and then. The discontent of Sabran seemed to have left a shadow of itself upon her. For the first time she seemed to be listening, as it were, to her life and to find a great silence in it; there was no echo in it of voices she loved.

Why had she never perceived it before? Why did she become conscious of it now? She asked herself this impatiently as the slight but bitter flavour of dissatisfaction touched her, and the days for once seemed—now and then—over long.

She loved her people and her forests and her mountains, and she had always thought that they would be sufficient for her, and she had honestly told the Princess that of solitude she was not afraid; and yet a certain sense that her life was cold and in a measure empty had of late crept upon her. She wondered angrily why a vague and intangible melancholy stole on her at times, which was different from the sorrow which still weighed on her for her brother's death. Now and then she looked at the old painted box of the spinet, and thought of the player who had awakened its dumb strings; but she did not suspect for a moment that it was in any sense his companionship which, now that it was lost, made the even familiar tenor of her time appear monotonous and without much interest. In the long evenings, whilst the Princess slumbered and she herself sat alone watching the twilight give way to the night over the broad and solemn landscape, she felt a lassitude which did not trouble her in the open air, in the daylight, or when she was busied indoors over the reports and requirements of her estates. Unacknowledged, indeed, unknown to her, she missed the coming of the little boat from the Holy Isle, and missed the prayer and praise of the great tone-poets rolling to her ear from the organ within. If any one had told her that her late guest had possessed any such power to make her days look grey and pass tediously she would have denied it, and been quite sincere in her denial. But as he had called out the long mute music from the spinet, so he had touched, if only faintly, certain chords in her nature that until then had been dumb.

'I am not like you, my dear Olga,' she wrote to her relative, the Countess Brancka. 'I am not easily amused. That *course effrénée* of the great world carries you honestly away with it; all those incessant balls, those endless visits, those interminable conferences on your toilettes, that continual circling of human butter-

flies round you, those perpetual courtships of half a score of young men; it all diverts you. You are never tired of it; you cannot understand any life outside its pale. All your days, whether they pass in Paris or Petersburg, at Trouville, at Biarritz, or at Vienna or Scheveningen, are modelled on the same lines; you must have excitement as you have your cup of chocolate when you wake. What I envy you is that the excitement excites you. When I was amidst it I was not excited; I was seldom even diverted. See the misfortune that it is to be born with a grave nature! I am as serious as Marcus Antoninus. You will say that it comes of having learned Latin and Greek. I do not think so; I fear I was born unamusable. I only truly care about horses and trees, and they are both grave things, though a horse can be playful enough sometimes when he is allowed to forget his servitude. Your friends, the famous tailors, send me admirably-chosen costumes which please that sense in me which Titians and Vandycks do (I do not mean to be profane); but I only put them on as the monks do their frocks. Perhaps I am very unworthy of them; at least, I cannot talk toilette as you can with ardour a whole morning and every whole morning of your life. You will think I am laughing at you; indeed I am not. I envy your faculty of sitting, as I am sure you are sitting now, in a straw chair on the shore, with a group of *boulevardiers* around you, and a crowd making a double hedge to look at you when it is your pleasure to pace the planks. My language is involved. I do not envy you the faculty of doing it, of course; I could do it myself to-morrow. I envy you the faculty of finding amusement in doing it, and finding flattery in the double hedge.'

A few days afterwards the Countess Brancka wrote back in reply:

'The world is like wine; *ça se mousse et ça monte.* There are heads it does not affect; there are palates that do not like it, yours amongst them. But there is so much too in habit. Living alone amidst your mountains you have lost all taste for the *brouhaha* of society, which grows noisier, it must be said, every year. Yes, we are noisy: we have lost our dignity. You alone keep yours, you are the châtelaine of the middle ages. Perceforest or Parsifal should come riding to your gates of granite. By the way, I hear you have been entertaining one of our *boulevardiers.* René de Sabran is charming, and the handsomest man in Paris; but he is not Parsifal or Perceforest. Between ourselves, he has an indifferent reputation, but perhaps he has repented on your Holy Isle. They say he is changed; that he has quarrelled with Cochonette, and that he is about to be made deputy for his department, whose representative has just died. Pardon me for naming Cochonette; it is part of our decadence that we laugh about all these naughty things and naughty people who are, after all, not so very much worse than we are ourselves. But you do not laugh,

whether at these or at anything else. You are too good, my beautiful Wanda; it is your sole defect. You have even inoculated this poor Marquis, who, after a few weeks upon the Szalrassee, surrenders Cochonette for the Chamber! My term of service comes round next month: if you will have me I will take the Tauern on my road to Gödöllö. I long to embrace you.'

'Olga will take pity on our solitude,' said Wanda von Szalras to her aunt. 'I have not seen her for four years, but I imagine she is little changed.'

The Princess read the letter, frowning and pursing her lips together in pretty rebuke as she came to the name of Cochonette.

'They have indeed lost all dignity,' she said with a sigh; 'and something more than dignity also. Olga was always frivolous.'

'All her *monde* is; not she more than another.'

'You were very unjust, you see, to M. de Sabran; he pays you the compliment of following your counsels.'

Wanda von Szalras rose a little impatiently. 'He had better have followed them before he broke the bank at Monaco. It is an odd sort of notoriety with which to attract the pious and taciturn Bretons; and when he was here he had no convictions. I suppose he picked them up with the gold pieces at the tables!'

Olga, Countess Brancka, *née* Countess Seriatine, of a noble Russian family, had been married at sixteen to the young Gela von Szalras, who, a few months after his bridal, had been shot dead on the battlefield of Solferino.

After scarce a year of mourning she had fascinated the brother of Egon Vàsàrhely, a mere youth who bore the title of Count Brancka. There had been long and bitter opposition made to the new alliance on the part of both families, on account of the consanguinity between Stefan Brancka and her dead lord. But opposition had only increased the ardour of the young man and the young widow; they had borne down all resistance, procured all dispensations, had been wedded, and in a year's time had both wished the deed undone. Both were extravagant, capricious, self-indulgent, and unreasonable; their two egotisms were in a perpetual collision. They met but seldom, and never met without quarrelling violently. The only issue of their union was two little, fantastic, artificial fairies who were called respectively Mila and Marie.

At the time of the marriage of the Branckas, Wanda had been too young to share in opposition to it; but the infidelity to her brother's memory had offended and wounded her deeply, and in her inmost heart she had never pardoned it, though the wife of Stefan Brancka had been a passing guest at Hohenszalras, where, had Count Gela lived, she would have reigned as sovereign mistress. That his sister reigned there in her stead the Countess Olga resented keenly and persistently. Her own portion of the wealth of the Szalras had been forfeited under her first marriage

contract by her subsebuent alliance. But she never failed to persuade herself that her exclusion from every share in that magnificent fortune was a deep wrong done to herself, and she looked upon Wanda von Szalras as the doer of that wrong.

In appearance, however, she was always cordial, caressing, affectionate, and if Wanda chose to mistrust her affection, it was, she reflected, only because a life of unwise solitude had made a character naturally grave become severe and suspicious.

She did not fail to arrive there a week later. She was a small, slender, lovely woman, with fair skin, auburn hair, wondrous black eyes, and a fragile frame that never knew fatigue. She held a high office at the Imperial Court, but when she was not on service, she spent, under the plea of health, all her time at Paris or *les eaux*. She came with her numerous attendants, her two tiny children, and a great number of huge *fourgons* full of all the newest marvels of combination in costume. She was seductive and caressing, but she was capricious, malicious, and could be even violent; in general she was gaily given up to amusement and intrigue, but she had moments of rage that were uncontrollable. She had had many indiscretions and some passions, but the world liked her none the less for that; she was a great lady, and in a sense a happy woman, for she had nerves of steel despite all her maladies, and brought to the pleasures of life an unflagging and even ravenous zest.

When with her perfume of Paris, her restless animation, her children, like little figures from a fashion-plate, her rapid voice that was shrill yet sweet, like a silver whistle, and her eyes that sparkled alike with mirth and with malice, she came on to the stately terraces of Hohenszalras, she seemed curiously discordant with it and its old world peace and gravity. She was like a pen-and-ink sketch of Cham thrust between the illuminated miniatures of a missal.

She felt it herself.

'It is the Roman de la Rose in stone,' she said, as her eyes roved over the building, which she had not visited for four years. 'And you, Wanda, you look like Yseulte of the White Hand or the Marguerite des Marguerites; you must be sorry you did not live in those times.'

'Yes: if only for one reason. One could make the impress of one's own personality so much more strongly on the time.'

'And now the times mould us. We are all horribly alike. There is only yourself who retain any individuality amidst all the women that I know. "*La meule du pressoir de l'abrutissement*" might have been written of our world. After all, you are wise to keep out of it. My straw chair at Trouville looks trumpery beside that ivory chair in your Rittersäal. I read the other day of some actresses dining off a truffled pheasant and a sack of bonbons. That is the sort of dinner we make all the year round,

morally—metaphorically—how do you say it? It makes us thirsty, and perhaps, I am not sure, perhaps it leaves us half starved, though we nibble the sweetmeats, and don't know it.'

'Your dinner must lack two things—bread and water.'

'Yes; we never see either. It is all truffles and caramels and *vins frappés.*'

'There is your bread.'

She glanced at the little children, two pretty, graceful little maids of six and seven years old.

'*Ouf*!' said the Countess Brancka. 'They are only little bits of puff paste, a couple of *petits fours* baked on the boulevards. If they be *chic*, and marry well, I for one shall ask no more of them. If ever you have children, I suppose you will rear them on science and the Antonines?'

'Perhaps on the open air and Homer,' said Wanda, with a smile.

The Countess Brancka was silent a moment, then said abruptly:

'You dismissed Egon again?'

'Has he made you his ambassadress?'

'No, oh no; he is too proud: only we all are aware of his wishes. Wanda, do you know that you have some cruelty in you, some sternness?'

'I think not. The cruelty would be to grant the wishes. With a loveless wife Egon would be much more unhappy than he is now.'

'Oh, after a few months he would not care, you know; they never do. To unite your fortunes is the great thing; you could lead your lives as you liked.'

'Our fortunes do very well apart,' said the Countess von Szalras, with a patience which cost her some effort.

'Yours is immense,' said Madame Brancka, with a sigh, for her own and her husband's wealth had been seriously involved by extravagance and that high play in which they both indulged. 'And it must accumulate in your hands. You cannot spend much. I do not see how you could spend much. You never receive; you never go to your palaces; you never leave Hohenszalras; and you are so wise a woman that you never commit any follies.'

Wanda was silent. It did not appear to her that she was called on to discuss her expenditure.

Dinner was announced; their attendants took away the children; the Princess woke up from a little doze, and said suddenly, 'Olga, is M. de Sabran elected?'

'Aunt Ottilie,' said her niece, hastily, 'has lost her affections to that gentleman, because he painted her saint on a screen and had all old Haydn at his fingers' ends.'

'The election does not take place until next month,' said the Countess. 'He will certainly be returned, because of the blind

fidelity of the department to his name. The odd thing is that he should wish to be so.'

'Wanda told him it was his duty,' said Princess Ottilie, with innocent malice.

The less innocent malice of the Countess Brancka's eyes fell for a passing moment with inquiry and curiosity on the face of her hostess, which, however, told her nothing.

'Then he *was* Parsifal or Perceforest!' she cried, 'and he has ridden away to find the emerald cup of tradition. What a pity that he paused on his way to break the bank at Monte Carlo. The two do not accord. I fear he is but Lancelot.'

'There is no reason why he should not pursue an honourable ambition,' said the Princess, with some offence.

'No reason at all, even if it be not an honourable one,' said Madame Brancka, with a curious intonation. 'He always wins at baccara; he has done some inimitable caricatures which hang at the Mirliton; he is an amateur Rubenstein, and he has been the lover of Cochonette. These are his qualifications for the Chamber, and if they be not as valiant ones as those of *les Preux* they are at least more amusing.'

'My dear Olga,' said the Princess, with a certain dignity of reproof, 'you are not on your straw chair at Trouville. There are subjects, expressions, suggestions, which are not agreeable to my ears or on your lips.'

'Cochonette!' murmured the offender, with a graceful little curtsey of obedience and contrition. 'Oh, Madame, if you knew! A year ago we talked of nothing else!'

The Countess Brancka wished to talk still of nothing else, and though she encountered a chillness and silence that would have daunted a less bold spirit, she contrived to excite in the Princess a worldly and almost unholy curiosity concerning that heroine of profane history who had begun life in a little bakehouse of the Batignolles, and had achieved the success of putting her name (or her nickname) upon the lips of all Paris.

Throughout dinner she spoke of little save of Cochonette, that goddess of *bouffe*, and of Parsifal, as she persisted in baptizing the one lover to whom alone the goddess had ever been faithful. With ill-concealed impatience her hostess bore awhile with the subject; then dismissed it somewhat peremptorily.

'We are provincials, my dear Olga,' she said, with a very cold inflection of contempt in her voice. 'We are very antiquated in our ways and our views. Bear with our prejudices and do not scare our decorum. We keep it by us as we keep kingfishers' skins amongst our furs in summer against moth; a mere superstition, I daresay, but we are only rustic people.'

'How you say that, Wanda,' said her guest, with a droll little laugh, 'and you look like Marie Antoinette all the while! Why will you bury yourself? You would only need to be seen in Paris a

week, and all the world would turn after you and go back to tradition and ermine, instead of *chien* and plush. If you live another ten years as you live now you will turn Hohenszalras into a religious house; and even Mdme. Ottilie would regret that. You will institute a Carmelite Order, because white becomes you so. Poor Egon, he would sooner have you laugh about Cochonette.'

The evening was chill, but beautifully calm and free of mist. Wanda von Szalras walked out on to the terrace, whilst her cousin and guest, missing the stimulus of her usual band of lovers and friends, curled herself up on a deep chair and fell sound asleep like a dormouse.

There was no sound on the night except the ripple of the lake water below and the splash of torrents falling down the cliffs around; a sense of irritation and of pleasure moved her both in the same moment. What was a French courtesan, a singer of lewd songs, an interpreter of base passions to her? Nothing except a creature to be loathed and pitied, as men in health feel a disgusted compassion for disease. Yet she felt a certain anger stir in her as she recalled all this frivolous, trivial, ill-flavoured chatter of her cousin's. And what was it to her if one of the many lovers of this woman had cast her spells from about him and left her for a manlier and a worthier arena? Yet she could not resist a sense of delicate distant homage to herself in the act, in the mute obedience to her counsels such as a knight might render, even Lancelot with stained honour and darkened soul.

The silence of it touched her.

He had said nothing: only by mere chance, in the idle circling of giddy rumour, she learned he had remembered her words and followed her suggestion. There was a subtle and flattering reverence in it which pleased the taste of a woman who was always proud but never vain. And to any noble temperament there is a singularly pure and honest joy in the consciousness of having been in any measure the means of raising higher instincts and loftier desires in any human soul that was not dead but dormant.

The shrill voice of Olga Brancka startled her as it broke in on her musings.

'I have been asleep!' she cried, as she rose out of her deep chair and came forth into the moonlight. 'Pray forgive me, Wanda. You will have all that drowsy water running and tumbling all over the place; it makes one think of the voices in the Sistine in Passion Week; there are the gloom, the hush, the sigh, the shriek, the eternal appeal, the eternal accusation. That water would drive me into hysteria; could you not drain it, divert it, send it underground—silence it somehow?'

'When you can keep the Neva flowing at New Year, perhaps I shall be able. But I would not if I could. I have had all that water about me from babyhood; when I am away from the sound of it I feel as if some hand had woolled up my ears.'

'That is what I feel when I am away from the noise of the streets. Oh, Wanda! to think that you can do utterly as you like and yet do not like to have the sea of light of the Champs-Elysées or the Graben before your eyes, rather than that gliding, dusky water!'

'The water is a mirror. I can see my own soul in it and Nature's; perhaps one hopes even sometimes to see God's.'

'That is not living, my dear; it is dreaming.'

'Oh, no, my life is very real; it is as real as light to darkness, it is absolute prose.'

'Make it poetry then; that is very easy.'

'Poetry is to the poetical; I am by no means poetical. My stud-book, my stewards' ledgers, my bankers' accounts, form the chief of my literature; you know I am a practical farmer.'

'I know you are one of the most beautiful and one of the richest women in Europe, and you live as if you were fifty years old, ugly, and *dévote*; all this will grow on you. In a few years' time you will be a hermit, a prude, an ascetic. You will found a new order, and be canonised after death.'

'My aunt is afraid that I shall die a freethinker. It is hard to please every one,' replied the Countess Wanda, with unruffled good humour. 'It is poetical people who found religious orders, enthusiasts, visionaries; I wish I were one of them. But I am not. The utmost I can do is to follow George Herbert's precept and sweep my own little chambers, so that this sweeping may be in some sort a duty done.'

'You are a good woman, Wanda, and I daresay a grand one, but you are too grave for me.'

'You mean that I am dull? People always grow dull who live much alone.'

'But you could have the whole world at your feet if you only raised a finger.'

'That would not amuse me at all.'

Her guest gave an impatient movement of her shoulders; after a little she said, 'Did Réné de Sabran amuse you?'

Wanda von Szalras hesitated a moment.

'In a measure he interested me,' she answered, being a perfectly truthful woman. 'He is a man who has the capacity of great things, but he seems to me to be his own worst enemy; if he had fewer gifts he might probably have more achievement. A waste of power is always a melancholy sight.'

'He is only a *boulevardier*, you know.'

'No doubt your Paris asphalte is the modern embodiment of Circe.'

'But he is leaving Circe.'

'So much the better for him if he be. But I do not know why you speak of him so much. He is a stranger to me, and will never, most likely, cross my path again.'

'Oh, Parsifal will come back,' said Madame Brancka, with a little smile. 'Hohenszalras is his Holy Grail.'

'He can scarcely come uninvited, and who will invite him here?' said the mistress of Hohenszalras, with cold literalness.

'Destiny will; the great master of the ceremonies who disposes of us all,' said her cousin.

'Destiny!' said Wanda, with some contempt. 'Ah, you are superstitious; irreligious people always are. You believe in mesmerism and disbelieve in God.'

'Oh, most Holy Mother, cannot you make Wanda a little like other people?' said the Countess Brancka when her hostess had left her alone with Princess Ottilie. 'She is as much a fourteenth-century figure as any one of those knights in the Rittersäal.'

'Wanda is a gentlewoman,' said the Princess drily. 'You great ladies are not always that, my dear Olga. You are all very *piquantes* and *provocantes*, no doubt, but you have forgotten what dignity is like, and perhaps you have forgotten, too, what self-respect is like. It is but another old-fashioned word.'

CHAPTER IX.

The late summer passed on into full autumn, and he never returned to the little isle under the birches and willows. The monks spoke of him often with the wondering admiration of rustic recluses for one who had seemed to them the very incarnation of that world which to them was only a vague name. His talents were remembered, his return was longed for; a silver reliquary and an antique book of plain song which he had sent them were all that remained to them of his sojourn there. As they angled for trout under the drooping boughs, or sat and dozed in the cloister as the rain fell, they talked together of that marvellous visitant with regret. Sometimes they said to one another that they had fancied once upon a time he would have become lord there, where the spires and pinnacles and shining sloping roofs of the great Schloss rose amidst the woods across the Szalrassee. When their grand prior heard them say so he rebuked them.

'Our lady is a true daughter of the Holy Church,' he said; 'all the lands and all the wealth she has will come to the Church. You will see, should we outlive her—which the saints send we may not do—that the burg will be bequeathed by her to form a convent of Ursulines. It is the order she most loves.'

She overheard him say so once when she sat in her boat beneath the willows drifting by under the island, and she sighed impatiently.

'No, I shall not do that,' she thought. 'The religious founda-

tions did a great work in their time, but that time is over. They can no more resist the pressure of the change of thought and habit than I can set sail like S. Ursula with eleven thousand virgins. Hohenszalras shall go to the Crown; they will do what seems best with it. But I may live fifty years and more.'

A certain sadness came over her as she thought so; a long life, a lonely life, appalled her, even though it was cradled in all luxury and strengthened with all power.

'If only my Bela were living!' she said, half aloud; and the water grew dim to her sight as it flowed away green and sparkling into the deep long shadows of its pine-clothed shores, shadows stretching darkly across its western side, whilst the eastern extremity was still warm in the afternoon light.

The great pile of Hohenszalras seemed to tower up into the very clouds; the evening sun, not yet sunk behind the Venediger range, shone ruddily on all its towers and its gothic spires, and the grim sculptures and the glistening metal, with which it was so lavishly ornamented, were illumined till it looked like some colossal and enchanted citadel, where soon the magic ivory horn of Childe Roland might sound and wake the spell-bound warders.

If only Bela, lord of all, had lived!

But her regret was not only for her brother.

In the October of that year her solitude was broken; her Sovereign signified her desire to see Hohenszalras again. They were about to visit Salzburg, and expressed their desire to pass three days in the Iselthal. There was nothing to be done but to express gratitude for the honour and make the necessary preparations. The von Szalras had been always loyal allies rather than subjects, and their devotion to the Habsburg house had been proved in many ways and with constancy. She felt that she would rather have to collect and equip a regiment of horse, as her fathers had done, than fill her home with the *tapage* inevitable to an Imperial reception, but she was not insensible to the friendship that dictated this mark of honour.

'Fate conspires to make me break my resolutions,' she said to the Princess; who answered with scant sympathy:

'There are some resolutions much more wisely broken than persevered in; your vows of solitude are amongst them.'

'Three days will not long affect my solitude.'

'Who knows? At all events, Hohenszalras for those three days will be worthy of its traditions—if only it will not rain.'

'We will hope that it may not. Let us prepare the list of invitations.'

When she had addressed all the invitations to some fifty of the greatest families of the empire for the house party, she took one of the cards engraved 'To meet their Imperial Majesties,' and hesitated some moments, then wrote across it the name of Sabran.

'You will like to see your friend,' she said as she passed it to her aunt.

'Certainly, I should like to do so, but I am quite sure he will not come.'

'Not come?'

'I think he will not. You will never understand, my dear Wanda, that men may love you.'

'I certainly saw nothing of love in the conversation of M. de Sabran,' she answered, with some irritation.

'In his conversation? Very likely not; he is a proud man and poor.'

'Since he has ceased to visit Monte Carlo.'

'You are ungenerous, Wanda.'

'I?'

The accusation fell on her with a shock of surprise, under which some sense of error stirred. Was it possible she could be ungenerous? She, whose character had always, even in its faults, been cast on lines so broad? She let his invitation go away with the rest in the post-bag to Matrey.

In a week his answer came with others. He was very sensible, very grateful, but the political aspect of the time forbade him to leave France. His election had entailed on him many obligations; the Chamber would meet next month, &c. &c. He laid his homage and regrets at the feet of the ladies of Hohenszalras.

'I was sure he would say so,' the Princess observed. It did not lie within her Christian obligations to spare the '*je vous l'avais bien dit.*'

'It is very natural that he should not jeopardise his public prospects,' answered Wanda herself, angrily conscious of a disappointment, with which there was mingled also a sense of greater respect for him than she had ever felt.

'He cares nothing at all about those,' said the Princess, sharply. 'If he had the position of Egon he would come. His political prospects! Do you pretend to be ignorant that he only went to the Chamber as he went to Romaris, because you recommended ambition and activity?'

'If that be the case he is most wise not to come,' answered, with some coldness, the châtelaine of Hohenszalras; and she went to visit the stables, which would be more important in the eyes of her Imperial mistress than any other part of the castle.

'She will like Cadiga,' she thought, as she stroked the graceful throat of an Arab mare which she had had over from Africa three months before, a pure bred daughter of the desert 'shod with lightning.'

She conversed long with her *stallmeister* Ulrich, and gave him various directions.

'We are all grown very rustic and old-fashioned here,' she said with a smile. 'But the horses at least will not disgrace us.'

Ulrich asked his most high countess if the Margraf von Sabran would be of the house-party, and when she answered 'No,' said, with regret, that no one had ever looked so well on Siegfried as he had done.

'He did ride very well,' she said, and turned to the stall where the sorrel Siegfried stood. She sighed unconsciously as she drew the tufted hair hanging over the horse's forehead through her fingers with tenderness. What if she were to make Siegfried and all else his, if it were true that he loved her? She thrust the thought away almost before it took any real shape.

'I do not even believe it,' she said half aloud, and yet in her innermost heart she did believe it.

The Imperial visit was made and became a thing of the past.

The state apartments were opened, the servants wore their state liveries, the lake had its banners and flags, its decorated landing-stairs and velvet-cushioned boats; the stately and silent place was full for three days and nights of animated and brilliant life, and great hunting parties rejoiced the soul of old Otto, and made the forests ring with sound of horn and rifle. The culverins on the keep fired their salutes, the chimes of the island monastery echoed the bells of the clock tower of the Schloss, the schools sang with clear fresh voices the Kaiser's Hymn, the sun shone, the jägers were in full glory, the castle was filled with guests and their servants, the long-unused theatre had a troop of Viennese to play comedies on its bijou stage, the ball-room, lined with its Venetian mirrors and its Reseiner gilding, was lit up once more after many years of gloom; the nobles of the provinces came from far and wide at the summons of the lady of Hohenszalras, and the greater nobles who formed the house-party were well amused and well content, whilst the Imperial guests were frankly charmed with all things, and honestly reluctant to depart.

When she accompanied them to the foot of the terrace stairs, and there took leave of them, she could feel that their visit had been one of unfeigned enjoyment, and her farewell gift to her Kaiserin was Cadiga. They had left early on the morning of the fourth day, and the remainder of the day was filled till sunset by the departure of the other guests; it was fatiguing and crowded. When the last visitor had gone she dropped down on a great chair in the Rittersäal, and gave a long-drawn sigh of relief.

'What a long strain on one's powers of courtesy!' she murmured. 'It is more exhausting than to climb Gross Glöckner!'

'It has been perfectly successful!' said the Princess, whose cheeks were warm and whose eyes were bright with triumph.

'It has been only a matter of money,' said the Countess von Szalras, with some contempt. 'Nothing makes one feel so *bourgeoise* as a thing like this. Any merchant or banker could do the same. It is impossible to put any originality into it. It is like diamonds. Any one only heard of yesterday could do as much if they had

only the money to do it with; you do not seem to see what I mean?'

'I see that, as usual, you are discontented when any other woman would be in paradise,' answered the Princess, a little tartly. 'Pray, could the *bourgeoise* have a residence ten centuries old?'

'I am afraid she could buy one easily.'

'Would that be the same thing?'

'Certainly not, but it would enable her to do all I have done for the last three days, if she had only money enough; she could even give away Cadiga.'

'She could not get Cadiga accepted!' said Mdme. Ottilie, drily 'You are tired, my love, and so do not appreciate your own triumphs. It has been a very great success.'

'They were very kind; they are always so kind. But all the time I could not help thinking, were they not horribly fatigued. It wearied me so myself, I could not believe that they were otherwise than weary too.'

'It has been a great success,' repeated the Princess. 'But you are always discontented.'

Wanda did not reply; she leaned back against the Cordovan leather back of the chair, crushing her chestnut hair against the emblazoned scutcheon of her house; she was very fatigued, and her face was pale. For three whole days and evenings to preserve an incessant vigilance of courtesy, a continual assumption of interest, an unremitting appearance of enjoyment, a perpetual smile of welcome, is very tedious work: those in love with social successes are sustained by the consciousness of them, but she was not. An Imperial visit more or less could add not one hair's breadth to the greatness of the house of Szalras.

And there was a dull, half-conscious pain at the bottom of her heart. She was thinking of Egon Vàsàrhely, who had said he could not leave his regiment; of Réné de Sabran, who had said he could not leave his country. Even to those who care nothing for society, and dislike the stir and noise of the world about them, there is still always a vague sense of depression in the dispersion of a great party; the house seems so strangely silent, the rooms seem so strangely empty, servants flitting noiselessly here and there, a dropped flower, a fallen jewel, an oppressive scent from multitudes of fading blossoms, a broken vase perhaps, or perhaps a snapped fan—these are all that are left of the teeming life crowded here one little moment ago. Though one may be glad they are all gone, yet there is a certain sadness in it. *'Le lendemain de la fête'* keeps its pathos, even though the fête itself has possessed no poetry and no power to amuse.

The Princess, who was very fatigued too, though she would not confess that social duties could ever exhaust any one, went softly away to her own room, and Wanda sat alone in the great Rittersäal, with the afternoon light pouring through the painted

casements on to the damascened armour, and the Flemish tapestries, and the great dais at the end of the hall, with its two-headed eagle that Dante cursed, its draperies of gold-coloured velvet, its escutcheons in beaten and enamelled metal.

Discontented! The Princess had left that truthful word behind her like a little asp creeping upon a marble floor. It stung her conscience with a certain reproach, her pride with a certain impatience. Discontented! She who had always been so equable of temper, so enamoured of solitude, so honestly loyal to her people and her duties, so entirely grateful to the placid days that came and went as calmly as the breathing of her breast!

Was it possible she was discontented?

How all the great world that had just left her would have laughed at her, and asked what doubled rose-leaf made her misery?

No one hardly on earth could be more entirely free than she was, more covered with all good gifts of fortune and of circumstances; and she had always been so grateful to her life until now. Would she never cease to miss the coming of the little boat across from the Holy Isle? She was angry that this memory should have so much power to pursue her thought and spoil the present hours. Had he but been there, she knew very well that the pageantry of the past three days would not have been the mere empty formalities, the mere gilded tedium that they had appeared to be to her.

On natures thoughtful and profound, silence has sometimes a much greater power than speech. Now and then she surprised herself in the act of thinking how artificial human life had become, when the mere accident of a greater or lesser fortune determined whether a man who respected himself could declare his feeling for a woman he loved. It seemed lamentably conventional and unreal, and yet had he not been fettered by silence he would have been no gentleman.

Life resumed its placid even tenor at Hohenszalras after this momentary disturbance. Autumn comes early in the Glöckner and Venediger groups. Madame Ottilie with a shiver heard the north winds sweep through the yellowing forests, and watched the white mantle descend lower and lower down the mountain sides. Another winter was approaching, a winter in which she would see no one, hear nothing, sit all day by her wood fire, half asleep for sheer want of interest to keep her awake: the very postboy was sometimes detained by the snowfall for whole days together in his passage to and from Matrey.

'It is all very well for you,' she said pettishly to her niece. 'You have youth, you have strength, you like to have four mad horses put in your sleigh and drive them like demoniacs through howling deserts of frozen pine forests, and come home when the great stars are all out, with your eyes shining like the planets,

and the beasts all white with foam and icicles. You like that; you can do it; you prefer it before anything, but I—what have I to do? One cannot eat nougats for ever, nor yet read one's missal. Even you will allow that the evenings are horribly long. Your horses cannot help you there. You embroider very artistically, but they would do that all for you at any convent; and to be sure you write your letters and audit your accounts, but you might just as well leave it all to your lawyers. Olga Brancka is quite right, though I do not approve of her mode of expression, but she is quite right—you should be in the world.'

But she failed to move Wanda by a hair's breadth, and soon the hush of winter settled down on Hohenszalras, and when the first frost had hardened the ground the four black horses were brought out in the sleigh, and their mistress, wrapped in furs to the eyes, began those headlong gallops through the silent forests which stirred her to a greater exhilaration than any pleasures of the world could have raised in her. To guide those high-mettled, half-broken, high-bred creatures, fresh from freedom on the plains of the Danube, was like holding the reins of the winds.

One day at dusk as she returned from one of these drives, and went to see the Princess Ottilie before changing her dress, the Princess received her with a little smile and demure air of triumph, of smiling triumph. In her hand was an open letter which she held out to her niece.

'Read!' she said with much self-satisfaction. 'See what miracles you and the Holy Isle can work.'

Wanda took the letter, which she saw at a glance was in the writing of Sabran. After some graceful phrases of homage to the Princess, he proceeded in it to say that he had taken his seat in the French Chamber, as deputy for his department.

'I do not deceive myself,' he continued. 'The trust is placed in me for the sake of the memories of the dead Sabran, not because I am anything in the sight of these people; but I will endeavour to be worthy of it. I am a sorry idler and of little purpose and strength in life, but I will endeavour to make my future more serious and more deserving of the goodness which was showered on me at Hohenszalras. It grieved me to be unable to profit by the permission so graciously extended to me at the time of their Imperial Majesties' sojourn with you, but it was impossible for me to come. My thoughts were with you, as they are indeed every hour. Offer my homage to the Countess von Szalras, with the renewal of my thanks.'

Then, with some more phrases of reverence and compliment blent in one to the venerable lady whom he addressed, he ended an epistle which brought as much pleasure to the recipient as though she had been seventeen instead of seventy.

She watched the face of Wanda during the perusal of these lines, but she did not learn anything from its expression.

'He writes admirably,' she said, when she had read it through; 'and I think he is well fitted for a political career. They say that it is always best in politics not to be burdened with convictions, and he will be singularly free from such impediments, for he has none!'

'You are very harsh and unjust,' said the Princess, angrily. 'No person can pay you a more delicate compliment than lies in following your counsels, and yet you have nothing better to say about it than to insinuate an unscrupulous immorality.'

'Politics are always immoral.'

'Why did you recommend them to him, then?' said the Princess, sharply.

'They are better than some other things—than *rouge et noir*, for instance; but I did not perhaps do right in advising a mere man of pleasure to use the nation as his larger gaming-table.'

'You are beyond my comprehension! Your wire drawing is too fine for my dull eyesight. One thing is certainly quite clear to me, dull as I am; you live alone until you grow dissatisfied with everything. There is no possibility of pleasing a woman who disapproves of the whole living world!'

'The world sees few unmixed motives,' said Wanda, to which the Princess replied by an impatient movement.

'The post has brought fifty letters for you. I have been looking over the journals,' she answered. 'There is something you may also perhaps deign to read.'

She held out a French newspaper and pointed to a column in it.

Wanda took it and read it, standing. It was a report of a debate in the French Chamber.

She read in silence and attentively, leaning against the great carved chimney-piece. 'I was not aware he was so good an orator,' she said simply, when she had finished reading.

'You grant that it is a very fine speech, a very noble speech?' said Madame Ottilie, eagerly and with impatience. 'You perceive the sensation it caused; it is evidently the first time he has spoken. You will see in another portion of the print how they praise him.'

'He has acquired his convictions with rapidity. He was a Socialist when here.'

'The idea! A man of his descent has always the instincts of his order: he may pretend to resist them, but they are always stronger than he. You might at least commend him, Wanda, since your words turned him towards public life.'

'He is no doubt eloquent,' she answered, with some reluctance. 'That we could see here. If he be equally sincere he will be a great gain to the nobility of France.'

'Why should you doubt his sincerity?'

'Is mere ambition ever sincere?'

'I really cannot understand you. You censured his waste of

ability and accession; you seem equally disposed to cavil at his exertions and use of his talent. Your prejudices are most cruelly tenacious.

'How can I applaud your friend's action until I am sure of his motive?'

'His motive is to please you,' thought the Princess, but she was too wary to say so.

She merely replied:

'No motive is ever altogether unmixed, as you cruelly observed; but I should say that his must be on the whole sufficiently pure. He wishes to relieve the inaction and triviality of a useless life.'

'To embrace a hopeless cause is always in a manner noble,' assented her niece. 'And I grant you that he has spoken very well.'

Then she went to her own room to dress for dinner.

In the evening she read the reported speech again, with closer attention. It was eloquent, ironical, stately, closely reasoned, and rose in its peroration to a caustic and withering eloquence of retort and invective. It was the speech of a born orator, but it was also the speech of a strongly conservative partisan.

'How much of what he says does he believe?' she thought, with a doubt that saddened her and made her wonder why it came to her. And whether he believed or not, whether he were true or false in his political warfare, whether he were selfish or unselfish in his ambitions, what did it matter to her?

He had stayed there a few weeks, and he had played so well that the echoes of his music still seemed to linger after him, and that was all. It was not likely they would ever meet again.

CHAPTER X.

With the New Year Madame Ottilie received another letter from him. It was brief, grateful, and touching. It concluded with a message of ceremonious homage to the châtelaine of Hohenszalras. Of his entrance into political life it said nothing. With the letter came a screen of gilded leather which he had painted himself, with passages from the history of S. Julian Hospitador.

'It will seem worthless,' he said, 'where every chamber is a museum of art; but accept it as a sign of my grateful and imperishable remembrance.'

The Princess was deeply touched and sensibly flattered.

'You will admit, at least,' she said, with innocent triumph, 'that he knows how to make gratitude graceful.'

'It is an ex-voto, and you are his patron saint, dear mother,'

said the Countess Wanda, with a smile; but the smile was one of approval. She thought his silence on his own successes and on her name was in good taste. And the screen was so admirably painted that the Venetian masters might have signed it without discredit.

'May I give him no message from you?' said the Princess, as she was about to write her reply.

Her niece hesitated.

'Say we have read his first speech, and are glad of his success,' she said, after a few moments' reflection.

'Nothing more?'

'What else should I say?' replied Wanda, with some irritation.

The Princess was too honourable a woman to depart from the text of the congratulation, but she contrived to throw a little more warmth into the spirit of it; and she did not show her letter to the mistress of Hohenszalras. She set the screen near her favourite chair in the blue-room.

'If only there were any one to appreciate it!' she said, with a sigh. 'Like everything else in this house, it might as well be packed up in a chest for aught people see of it. This place is not a museum; the world goes to a museum: it is a crypt!'

'Would it be improved by a crowd of sightseers at ten kreutzers a head?'

'No: but it would be very much brightened by a house-party at Easter, and now and then at midsummer and autumn. In your mother's time the October parties for the bear-hunts, the wolf-hunts, the boar-hunts, were magnificent. No, I do not think the chase contrary to God's will; man has power over the beasts of the field and the forest. The archdukes never missed an autumn here; they found the sport finer than in Styria.'

Her niece kissed her hand and went out to where her four black horses were fretting and champing before the great doors, and the winter sun was lighting up the gilded scroll-work, and the purple velvet, and the brown sables of her sleigh, that had been built in Russia and been a gift to her from Egon Vàsàrhely. She felt a little impatience of the Princess Ottilie, well as she loved her; the complacent narrowness of mind, the unconscious cruelty, the innocent egotism, the conventional religion which clipped and fitted the ways of Deity to suit its own habits and wishes: these fretted her, chafed her, oppressed her with a sense of their utter vanity. The Princess would not herself have harmed a sparrow or a mouse, yet it seemed to her that Providence had created all the animal world only to furnish pastime for princes and their jägers. She saw no contradiction in this view of the matter. The small conventional mind of her had been cast in that mould and would never expand: it was perfectly pure and truthful, but it was contracted and filled with formula.

Wanda von Szalras, who loved her tenderly, could not help a certain impatience of this, the sole companionship she had. A deep

affection may exist side by side with a mental disparity that creates an unwilling but irresistible sense of tedium and discordance. A clear and broad intelligence is infinitely patient of inferiority; but its very patience has its reaction in its own fatigue and silent irritation.

This lassitude came on her most in the long evenings whilst the Princess slumbered and she herself sat alone. She was not haunted by it when she was in the open air, or in the library, occupied with the reports or the requirements on her estates. But the evenings were lonely and tedious; they had not seemed so when the little boat had come away from the monastery, and the prayer and praise of Handel and Haydn, and the new-born glory of the Nibelungen tone-poems had filled the quiet twilight hours. It was in no way probable that the musician and she would ever meet again. She understood that his own delicacy and pride must perforce keep him out of Austria, and she, however much the Princess desired it, could never invite him there alone, and would not probably gather such a house-party at Hohenszalras as might again warrant her doing so.

Nothing was more unlikely, she supposed, than that she would ever hear again the touch that had awakened the dumb chords of the old painted spinet.

But circumstance, that master of the ceremonies, as Madame Brancka termed it, who directs the *menuet de la cour* of life, and who often diverts himself by letting it degenerate into a dance of death, willed it otherwise. There was a dear friend of hers who was a dethroned and exiled queen. Their friendship was strong, tender, and born in childish days. On the part of Wanda, it had been deepened by the august adversity which impresses and attaches all noble natures. Herself born of a great race, and with the instincts of a ruling class hereditary in her, there was something sacred and awful in the fall of majesty. Her friend, stripped of all appanages of her rank, and deserted by nearly all who had so late sworn her allegiance, became more than ever dear; she became holy to her, and she would sooner have denied the request of a reigning sovereign than of one powerless to command or to rebuke. When this friend, who had been so hardly smitten by fate, sent her word that she was ill and would fain see her, she, therefore, never even hesitated as to obedience before the summons. It troubled and annoyed her; it came to her ill-timed and unexpected; and it was above all disagreeable to her, because it would take her to Paris. But it never occurred to her to send an excuse to this friend, who had no longer any power to say, 'I will,' but could only say, like common humanity, 'I hope.'

Within two hours of her reception of the summons she was on her way to Windisch-Matrey. The Princess did not accompany her; she intended to make as rapid a journey as possible without pausing on the way, and her great-aunt was too old and too delicate in health for such exertion.

'Though I would fain go and see that great Parisian aurist,' she said plaintively. 'My hearing is not what it used to be.'

'The great aurist shall come to you, dear mother,' said Wanda. 'I will bring him back with me.'

She travelled with a certain state, since she did not think that the moment of a visit to a dethroned sovereign was a fit time to lay ceremony aside. She took several of her servants and some of her horses with her, and journeyed by way of Munich and Strasburg.

Madame Ottilie was too glad she should go anywhere to offer opposition; and in her heart of hearts she thought of her favourite. He was in Paris; who knew what might happen?

It was midwinter, and the snow was deep on all the country, whether of mountain or of plain, which stretched between the Tauern and the French capital. But there was no great delay of the express, and in some forty hours the Countess von Szalras, with her attendants, and her horses with theirs, arrived at the Hôtel Bristol.

The noise, the movement, the brilliancy of the streets seemed a strange spectacle, after four years spent without leaving the woodland quiet and mountain solitudes of Hohenszalras.

She was angry with herself that, as she stood at the windows of her apartment, she almost unconsciously watched the faces of the crowd passing below, and felt a vague expectancy of seeing amongst them the face of Sabran.

She went that evening to the modest hired house where the young and beautiful sovereign she came to visit had found a sorry refuge. It was a meeting full of pain to both. When they had last parted at the Hofburg of Vienna, the young queen had been in all the triumph and hope of brilliant nuptials; and at Hohenszalras, the people's Heilige Bela had been living, a happy boy, in all his fair promise.

Meanwhile, the news-sheets informed all their readers that the Countess von Szalras was in Paris. Ambassadors and ambassadresses, princes and princesses, and a vast number of very great people, hastened to write their names at the Hôtel Bristol.

Amongst the cards left was that of Sabran. But he sent it; he did not go in person.

She refused all invitations, and declined almost all visits. She had come there only to see her friend, the Queen of Natalia. Paris, which loves anything new, talked a great deal about her; and its street crowds, which admires what is beautiful, began to gather before the doors at the hours when her black horses, driven Russian fashion, came fretting and flashing like meteors over the asphalte.

'Why did you bring your horses for so short a time?' said Madame Kaulnitz to her. 'You could, of course, have had any of ours.'

'I always like to have some of my horses with me,' she

answered. 'I would have brought them all, only it would have looked so ostentatious; you know they are my children.'

'I do not see why you should not have other children,' said Madame Kaulnitz. 'It is quite inhuman that you will not marry.'

'I have never said that I will not. But I do not think it likely.'

Two days after her arrival, as she was driving down the Avenue de l'Impératrice, she saw Sabran on foot. She was driving slowly. She would have stopped her carriage if he had paused in his walk; but he did not, he only bowed low and passed on. It was almost rude, after the hospitality of Hohenszalras, but the rudeness pleased her. It spoke both of pride and of sensitiveness. It seemed scarcely natural, after their long hours of intercourse, that they should pass each other thus as strangers; yet it seemed impossible they should any more be friends. She did not ask herself why it seemed so, but she felt it rather by instinct than by reasoning.

She was annoyed to feel that the sight of him had caused a momentary emotion in her of mingled trouble and pleasure.

No one mentioned his name to her, and she asked no one concerning him. She spent almost all her time with the Queen of Natalia, and there were other eminent foreign personages in Paris at that period whose amiabilities she could not altogether reject, and she had only allowed herself fifteen days as the length of her sojourn, as Madame Ottilie was alone amidst the snow-covered mountains of the Tauern.

On the fifth day after her meeting with Sabran he sent another card of his to the hotel, and sent with it an immense basket of gilded osier filled with white lilac. She remembered having once said to him at Hohenszalras that lilac was her flower of preference. Her rooms were crowded with bouquets, sent her by all sorts of great people, and made of all kinds of rare blossoms, but the white lilac, coming in the January snows, touched her more than all those. She knew that his poverty was no fiction; and that great clusters of white lilac in midwinter in Paris meant much money.

She wrote a line or two in German, which thanked him for his recollection of her taste, and sent it to the Chamber. She did not know where he lived.

That evening she mentioned his name to her godfather, the Duc de Noira, and asked him if he knew it. The Duc, a Legitimist, a recluse, and a man of strong prejudices, answered at once.

'Of course I know it; he is one of us, and he has made a political position for himself within the last year.'

'Do you know him personally?'

'No, I do not. I see no one, as you are aware; I live in

greater retirement than ever. But he bears an honourable name, and though I believe that, until lately, he was but a *flâneur*, he has taken a decided part this session, and he is a very great acquisition to the true cause.'

'It is surely very sudden, his change of front?'

'What change? He took no part in politics that ever I heard of; it is taken for granted that a Marquis de Sabran is loyal to his sole legitimate sovereign. I believe he never thought of public life; but they tell me that he returned from some long absence last autumn, an altered and much graver man. Then one of the deputies for his department died, and he was elected for the vacancy with no opposition.'

The Duc de Noira proceeded to speak of the political aspects of the time, and said no more.

Involuntarily, as she drove through the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne, she thought of the intuitive comprehension, the half-uttered sympathy, the interchange of ideas, *à demi-mots*, which had made the companionship of Sabran so welcome to her in the previous summer. They had not always agreed, she often had not even approved him; but they had always understood one another, they had never needed to explain. She was startled to realise how much and how vividly she regretted him.

'If one could only be sure of his sincerity,' she thought, 'there would be few men living who would equal him.'

She did not know why she doubted his sincerity. Some natures have keen instincts like dogs. She regretted to doubt it; but the change in him seemed to her too rapid to be one of conviction. Yet the homage in it to herself was delicate and subtle. She would not have been a woman had it not touched her, and she was too honest with herself not to frankly admit in her own thoughts that she might very well have inspired a sentiment which would go far to change a nature which it entered and subdued. Many men had loved her; why not he?

She drew the whip over the flanks of her horses as she felt that mingled impatience and sadness with which sovereigns remember that they can never be certain they are loved for themselves, and not for all which environs them and lifts them up out of the multitude.

She was angry with herself when she felt that what interested her most during her Parisian sojourn was the report of the debates of the French Chamber in the French journals.

One night the Baron Kaulnitz spoke of Sabran in her hearing.

'He is the most eloquent of the Legitimist party,' he said to some one in her hearing. 'No one supposed that he had it in him; he was a mere idler, a mere man of pleasure, and it was at times said of something worse, but he has of late manifested great talent; it is displayed for a lost cause, but it is none the less admirable as talent goes.'

She heard what he said with pleasure.

Advantage was taken of her momentary return to the world to press on her the choice of a great alliance. Names as mighty as her own were suggested to her, and more than one great prince, of rank even higher than hers, humbly solicited the honour of the hand which gave no caress except to a horse's neck, a dog's head, a child's curls. But she did not even pause to allow these proposals any consideration; she refused them all curtly, and with a sense of irritation.

'Have you sworn never to marry?' said the Duc de Noira, with much chagrin, receiving her answer for a candidate of his own to whom he was much attached.

'I never swear anything,' she answered. 'Oaths are necessary for people who do not know their own minds. I do know my own.'

'You know that you will never marry?'

'I hardly say that; but I shall never contract a mere alliance. It is horrible—that union eternal of two bodies and souls without sympathy, without fitness, without esteem, merely for sake of additional position or additional wealth.'

'It is not eternal!' said the Duc, with a smile; 'and I can assure you that my friend adores you for yourself. You will never understand, Wanda, that you are a woman to inspire great love; that you would be sought for your face, for your form, for your mind, if you had nothing else.'

'I do not believe it.'

'Can you doubt at least that your cousin Egon——'

'Oh, pray spare me the name of Egon!' she said with unwonted irritation. 'I may surely be allowed to have left that behind me at home!'

It was a time of irritation and turbulence in Paris. The muttering of the brooding storm was visible to fine ears through the false stillness of an apparently serene atmosphere. She, who knew keen and brilliant politicians who were not French, saw the danger that was at hand for France which France did not see.

'They will throw down the glove to Prussia, and they will repent of it as long as the earth lasts,' she thought, and she was oppressed by her prescience, for war had cost her race dear; and she said to herself, 'When that liquid fire is set flowing who shall say where it will pause?'

She felt an extreme desire to converse with Sabran as she had done at home; to warn him, to persuade him, to hear his views and express to him her own; but she did not summon him, and he did not come. She did justice to the motive which kept him away, but she was not as yet prepared to go as far as to invite him to lay his scruples aside and visit her with the old frank intimacy which had brightened both their lives at the Hohenszalrasburg. It had been so different there; he had been a

wanderer glad of rest, and she had had about her the defence of the Princess's presence, and the excuse of the obligations of hospitality. She reproached herself at times for hardness, for unkindness; she had not said a syllable to commend him for that abandonment of a frivolous life which was in itself so delicate and lofty a compliment to herself. He had obeyed her quite as loyally as knight ever did his lady, and she did not even say to him, 'It is well done.'

Wanda von Szalras—a daughter of brave men, and herself the bravest of women—was conscious that she was for once a coward. She was afraid of looking into her own heart.

She said to her cousin, when he paid his respects to her, 'I should like to hear a debate at the Chamber. Arrange it for me.'

He replied: 'At your service in that as in all things.'

The next day as she was about to drive out, about four o'clock, he met her at the entrance of her hotel.

'If you could come with me,' he said, 'you might hear something of interest to-day; there will be a strong discussion. Will you accept my carriage or shall I enter yours?'

What she heard when she reached the Chamber did not interest her greatly. There was a great deal of noise, of declamation, of personal vituperation, of verbose rancour; it did not seem to her to be eloquence. She had heard much more stately oratory in both the Upper and Lower Reichsrath, and much more fiery and noble eloquence at Buda Pesth. This seemed to her poor, shrill mouthing, which led to very little, and the disorder of the Assembly filled her with contempt.

'I thought it was the country of S. Louis!' she said, with a disdainful sigh, to Kaulnitz, who answered:

'Cromwell is perhaps more wanted here than S. Louis.'

'Their Cromwell will always be a lawyer without clients, or a journalist *sans le sou*!' retorted the châtelaine of Hohenszalras.

When she had been there an hour or more she saw Sabran enter the hall and take his place. His height, his carriage, and his distinction of appearance made him conspicuous in a multitude, while the extreme fairness and beauty of his face were uncommon and striking.

'Here is S. Louis,' said the ambassador, with a little smile, 'or a son of S. Louis's crusaders, at any rate. He is sure to speak. I think he speaks very well; one would suppose he had done nothing else all his life.'

After a time, when some speakers, virulent, over-eager, and hot in argument, had had their say, and a tumult had risen and been quelled, and the little bell had rung violently for many minutes, Sabran entered the tribune. He had seen the Austrian minister and his companion.

His voice, at all times melodious, had a compass which could fill with ease the large hall in which he was. He appeared to use

no more effort than if he were conversing in ordinary tones, yet no one there present lost a syllable that he said. His gesture was slight, calm, and graceful; his language admirably chosen and full of dignity.

His mission of the moment was to attack the ministry upon their foreign policy, and he did so with exceeding skill, wit, irony, and precision. His eloquence was true eloquence, and was not indebted in any way to trickery, artifice, or over-ornament. He spoke with fire, force, and courage, but his tranquillity never gave way for a moment. His speech was brilliant and serene, in utter contrast to the turbulent and florid declamation which had preceded him. There was great and prolonged applause when he had closed with a peroration stately and persuasive; and when Emile Ollivier rose to reply, that optimistic statesman was plainly disturbed and at a loss.

Sabran resumed his seat without raising his eyes to where the Countess von Szalras sat. She remained there during the speech of the minister, which was a lame and laboured one, for he had been pierced between the joints of his armour. Then she rose and went away with her escort.

'What do you think of S. Louis?' said he, jestingly.

'I think he is very eloquent and very convincing, but I do not think he is at all like a Frenchman.'

'Well, he is a *Breton bretonnant*,' rejoined the ambassador. 'They are always more in earnest and more patrician.'

'If he be sincere, if he be only sincere,' she thought: that doubt pursued her. She had a vague sense that it was all only a magnificent comedy after all. Could apathy and irony change all so suddenly to conviction and devotion? Could the scoffer become so immediately the devotee? Could he care, really care, for those faiths of throne and altar which he defended with so much eloquence, so much earnestness? And yet, why not? These faiths were inherited things with him; their altars must have been always an instinct with him; for their sake his fathers had lived and died. What great wonder, then, that they should have been awakened in him after a torpor which had been but the outcome of those drugs with which the world is always so ready to lay asleep the soul?

They had now got out into the corridors, and as they turned the corner of one, they came straight upon Sabran.

'I congratulate you,' said Wanda, as she stretched her hand out to him with a smile.

As he took it and bowed over it he grew very pale.

'I have obeyed you,' he murmured, 'with less success than I could desire.'

'Do not be too modest, you are a great orator. You know how to remain calm whilst you exalt, excite, and influence others.'

He listened in silence, then inquired for the health of his kind friend the Princess Ottilie.

'She is well,' answered Wanda, 'and loses nothing of her interest in you. She reads all your speeches with approval and pleasure; not the less approval and pleasure because her political creed has become yours.'

He coloured slightly.

'What did you tell me?' he said. 'That if I had no convictions, I could do no better than abide by the traditions of the Sabrans? If their cause were the safe and reigning one I would not support it for mere expediency, but as it is——'

'Your motives cannot be selfish ones,' she answered a little coldly. 'Selfishness would have led you to profess Bakouinism; it is the popular profession, and a socialistic aristocrat is always attractive and flattering to the *plebs*.'

'You are severe,' he said, with a flush on his cheek. 'I have no intention of playing Philip Egalité now or in any after time.'

She did not reply; she was conscious of unkindness and want of encouragement in her own words. She hesitated a little, and then said:

'Perhaps you will have time to come and see me? I shall remain here a few days more.'

The ambassador joined them at that moment, and was too well bred to display any sign of the supreme astonishment he felt at finding the Countess von Szalras and the new deputy already known to each other.

'He is a favourite of Aunt Ottilie's,' she explained to him as, leaving Sabran, they passed down the corridor. 'Did I not tell you? He had an accident on the Umbal glacier last summer, and in his convalescence we saw him often.'

'I recollect that your aunt asked me about him. Excuse me; I had quite forgotten,' said the ambassador, understanding now why she had wanted to go to the Chamber.

The next day Sabran called upon her. There were with her three or four great ladies. He did not stay long, and was never alone with her. She felt an impatience of her friends' presence, which irritated her as it awoke in her. He sent her a second basket of white lilac in the following forenoon. She saw no more of him.

She found herself wondering about the manner of his life. She did not even know in what street he lived; she passed almost all her time with the Queen of Natalia, who did not know him, and was still so unwell that she received no one.

She was irritated with herself because it compromised her consistency to desire to stay on in Paris, and she did so desire; and she was one of those to whom a consciousness of their own consistency is absolutely necessary as a qualification for self-respect. There are natures that fly contentedly from caprice to caprice, as

humming-birds from blossom to bud; but if she had once become changeable she would have become contemptible to herself, she would hardly have been herself any longer. With some anger at her own inclinations she resisted them, and when her self-allotted fifteen days were over, she did not prolong them by so much as a dozen hours. There was an impatience in her which was wholly strange to her serene and even temper. She felt a vague dissatisfaction with herself; she had been scarcely generous, scarcely cordial to him; she failed to approve her own conduct, and yet she scarcely saw where she had been at fault.

The Kaulnitz and many other high persons were at the station in the chill, snowy, misty day to say their last farewells. She was wrapped in silver-fox fur from head to foot; she was somewhat pale; she felt an absurd reluctance to go away from a city which was nothing to her. But her exiled friend was recovering health, and Madame Ottilie was all alone; and though she was utterly her own mistress, far more so than most women, there were some things she could not do. To stay on in Paris seemed to her to be one of them.

The little knot of high personages said their last words; the train began slowly to move upon its way; a hand passed through the window of the carriage and laid a bouquet of lilies of the valley on her knee.

'Adieu!' said Sabran very gently, as his eyes met hers once more.

Then the express train rolled faster on its road, and passed out by the north-east, and in a few minutes had left Paris far behind it.

CHAPTER XI.

On her return she spoke of her royal friends, of her cousins, of society, of her fears for the peace of Europe, and her doubts as to the strength of the empire; but she did not speak of the one person of whom, beyond all others, Mdme. Ottilie was desirous to hear. When some hours had passed, and still she had never alluded to the existence of Sabran, the Princess could bear silence no longer, and casting prudence to the winds, said boldly and with impatience:

'And your late guest? Have you nothing to tell me? Surely you have seen him?'

'He called once,' she answered, 'and I heard him speak at the Chamber.'

'And was that all?' cried the Princess, disappointed.

'He speaks very well in public,' added Wanda, 'and he said

many tender and grateful things of you, and sent you many messages—such grateful ones that my memory is too clumsy a tray to hold such eggshell china.'

She was angered with herself as she spoke, but the fragrance of the white lilac and the remembrance of its donor pursued her—angered with herself, too, because Hohenszalras seemed for the moment sombre, solitary, still, almost melancholy, wrapped in that winter whiteness and stillness which she had always loved so well.

The next morning she saw all her people, visited her schools and her stables, and tried to persuade herself that she was as contented as ever.

The aurist came from Paris shortly after her, and consoled the Princess by assuring her that the slight deafness she suffered from occasionally was due to cold.

'Of course!' she said, with some triumph. 'These mountains, all this water, rain whenever there is not snow, snow whenever there is not rain; it is a miracle, and the mercy of Heaven, if one saves any of one's five senses uninjured in a residence here.'

She had her satin hood trebly wadded, and pronounced the aurist a charming person. Herr Greswold in an incautious moment had said to her that deafness was one of the penalties of age and did not depend upon climate. A Paris doctor would not have earned his fee of two hundred napoleons if he had only produced so ungallant a truism. She heard a little worse after his visit, perhaps, but if so, she said that was caused by the additional wadding in her hood. He had told her to use a rose-water syringe, and Herr Greswold was forbidden her presence for a week because he averred that you might as well try to melt the glacier with a lighted pastille.

The aurist gone, life at Hohenszalras resumed its even tenor; and except for the post, the tea-cups, and the kind of dishes served at dinner, hardly differed from what life had been there in the sixteenth century, save that there were no saucy pages playing in the court, and no destriers stamping in the stalls, and no culverins loaded on the bastions.

'It is like living between the illuminated leaves of one of the Hours,' thought the Princess, and though her conscience told her that to dwell so in a holy book like a pressed flower was the most desirable life that could be granted by Heaven to erring mortality, still she felt it was dull. A little gossip, a little movement, a little rolling of other carriage-wheels than her own, had always seemed desirable to her.

Life here was laid down on broad lines. It was stately, austere, tranquil; one day was a mirror of all the rest. The Princess fretted for some little *frou-frou* of the world to break its solemn silence.

When Wanda returned from her ride one forenoon she said a little abruptly to her aunt:

'I suppose you will be glad to hear you have convinced me. I have telegraphed to Ludwig to open and air the house in Vienna; we will go there for three months. It is, perhaps, time I should be seen at Court.'

'It is a very sudden decision!' said Madame Ottilie, doubting that she could hear aright.

'It is the fruit of your persuasions, dear mother mine! The only advantage in having houses in half a dozen different places is to be able to go to them without consideration. You think me obstinate, whimsical, barbaric; the Kaiserin thinks so too. I will endeavour to conquer my stubbornness. We will go to Vienna next week. You will see all your old friends, and I all my old jewels.'

The determination once made, she adhered to it. She had felt a vague annoyance at the constancy and the persistency with which regret for the lost society of Sabran recurred to her. She had attributed it to the solitude in which she lived; that solitude which is the begetter and the nurse of thought may also be the hotbed of unwise fancies. It was indeed a solitude filled with grave duties, careful labours, high desires and endeavours; but perhaps, she thought, the world for a while, even in its folly, might be healthier, might preserve her from the undue share which the memory of a stranger had in her musings.

Her people, her lands, her animals, would none of them suffer by a brief absence; and perhaps there were duties due as well to her position as to her order. She was the only representative of the great Counts of Szalras. With the whimsical ingratitude to fate common to human nature, she thought she would sooner have been obscure, unnoticed, free. Her rank began to drag on her with something like the sense of a chain. She felt that she was growing irritable, fanciful, thankless; so she ordered the huge old palace in the Herrengasse to be got ready, and sought the world as others sought the cloister.

In a week's time she was installed in Vienna, with a score of horses, two score of servants, and all the stir and pomp that attend a great establishment in the most aristocratic city of Europe, and she made her first appearance at a ball at the Residenz covered with jewels from head to foot; the wonderful old jewels that for many seasons had lain unseen in their iron coffers—opals given by Rurik, sapphires taken from Kara Mustafa, pearls worn by her people at the wedding of Mary of Burgundy, diamonds that had been old when Maria Theresa had been young.

She had three months of continual homage, of continual flattery, of what others called pleasure, and what none could have denied was splendour. Great nobles laid their heart and homage before her feet, and all the city looked after her for her beauty as

she drove her horses round the Ringstrasse. It left her all very cold and unamused and indifferent.

She was impatient to be back at Hohenszalras, amidst the stillness of the woods, the sound of the waters.

'You cannot say now that I do not care for the world, because I have forgotten what it was like,' she observed to her aunt.

'I wish you cared more,' said the Princess. 'Position has its duties.'

'I never dispute that; only I do not see that being wearied by society constitutes one of them. I cannot understand why people are so afraid of solitude; the routine of the world is quite as monotonous.'

'If you only appreciated the homage that you receive——'

'Surely one's mind is something like one's conscience: if one can be not too utterly discontented with what it says one does not need the verdict of others.'

'That is only a more sublime form of vanity. Really, my love, with your extraordinary and unnecessary humility in some things, and your overweening arrogance in others, you would perplex wiser heads than the one I possess.'

'No; I am sure it is not vanity or arrogance at all; it may be pride—the sort of pride of the "Rohan je suis." But it is surely better than making one's barometer of the smiles of simpletons.'

'They are not all simpletons.'

'Oh, I know they are not; but the world in its aggregate is very stupid. All crowds are mindless, the crowd of the Haupt-Allee as well as of the Wurstel-Prater.'

The Haupt-Allee indeed interested her still less than the Wurstel-Prater, and she rejoiced when she set her face homeward and saw the chill white peaks of the Glöckner arise out of the mists. Yet she was angry with herself for the sense of something missing, something wanting, which still remained with her. The world could not fill it up, nor could all her philosophy or her pride do so either.

The spring was opening in the Tauern, slow coming, veiled in rain, and parting reluctantly with winter, but yet the spring, flinging primroses broadcast through all the woods, and filling the shores of the lakes with hepatica and gentian; the loosened snows were plunging with a hollow thunder into the ravines and the rivers, and the grass was growing green and long on the alps between the glaciers. A pale sweet sunshine was gleaming on the grand old walls of Hohenszalras, and turning to silver and gold all its innumerable casements as she returned, and Donau and Neva leaped in rapture on her.

'It is well to be at home,' she said, with a smile, to Herr Greswold, as she passed through the smiling and delighted household down the Rittersäal, which was filled with plants from the

hothouses, gardenias and gloxianas, palms and ericas, azaleas and camellias glowing between the stern armoured figures of the knights and the time-darkened oak of their stalls.

'This came from Paris this morning for Her Excellency,' said Hubert, as he showed his mistress a gilded boat-shaped basket, filled with tea-roses and orchids; a small card was tied to its handle with '*Willkommen*' written on it.

She coloured a little as she recognised the handwriting of the single word.

How could he have known, she wondered, that she would return home that day? And for the flowers to be so fresh, a messenger must have been sent all the way with them by express speed, and Sabran was poor.

'That is the Stanhopea tigrina,' said Herr Greswold, touching one with reverent fingers; 'they are all very rare. It is a welcome worthy of you, my lady.'

'A very extravagant one,' said Wanda von Szalras, with a certain displeasure that mingled with a softened emotion. 'Who brought it?'

'The Marquis de Sabran, by *extra-poste*, himself this morning,' answered Hubert—an answer she did not expect. 'But he would not wait; he would not even take a glass of tokayer, or let his horses stay for a feed of corn.'

'What knight-errantry!' said the Princess well pleased.

'What folly!' said Wanda, but she had the basket of orchids taken to her own octagon room.

It seemed as if he had divined how much of late she had thought of him. She was touched, and yet she was angered a little.

'Surely she will write to him,' thought the Princess wistfully very often: but she did not write. To a very proud woman the dawning consciousness of love is always an irritation, an offence, a failure, a weakness: the mistress of Hohenszalras could not quickly pardon herself for taking with pleasure the message of the orchids.

A little while later she received a letter from Olga Brancka. In it she wrote from Paris:

'Parsifal is doing wonders in the Chamber, that is, he is making Paris talk; his party will forbid him doing anything else. You certainly worked a miracle. I hear he never plays, never looks at an actress, never does anything wrong, and when a grand heiress was offered to him by her people refused her hand blandly but firmly. What is one to think? That he washed his soul white in the Szalrassee?'

It was the subtlest flattery of all, the only flattery to which she would have been accessible, this entire alteration in the current of a man's whole life; this change in habit, inclination, temper, and circumstance. If he had approached her its charm

would have been weakened, its motive suspected; but aloof and silent as he remained, his abandonment of all old ways, his adoption of a sterner and worthier career, moved her with its marked, mute homage of herself.

When she read his discourses in the French papers she felt a glow of triumph, as if she had achieved some personal success; she felt a warmth at her heart as of something near and dear to her, which was doing well and wisely in the sight of men. His cause did not, indeed, as Olga Brancka had said, render tangible, practical, victory impossible for him, but he had the victories of eloquence, of patriotism, of high culture, of pure and noble language, and these blameless laurels seemed to her half of her own gathering.

'Will you never reward him?' the Princess ventured to say at last, overcome by her own impatience to rashness. 'Never? Not even by a word?'

'Dear mother,' said Wanda, with a smile which perplexed and baffled the Princess, 'if your hero wanted reward he would not be the leader of a lost cause. Pray do not suggest to me a doubt of his disinterestedness. You will do him very ill service.'

The Princess was mute, vaguely conscious that she had said something ill-timed or ill-advised.

Time passed on and brought beautiful weather in the month of June, which here in the High Tauern means what April does in the south. Millions of song-birds were shouting in the woods, and thousands of nests were suspended on the high branches of the forest trees, or hidden in the greenery of the undergrowth; water-birds perched and swung in the tall reeds where the brimming streams tumbled; the purple, the white, and the grey herons were all there, and the storks lately flown home from Asia or Africa were settling in bands by the more marshy grounds beside the northern shores of the Szalrassee.

One afternoon she had been riding far and fast, and on her return a telegram from Vienna had been brought to her, sent on from Lienz. Having opened it, she approached her aunt and said with an unsteady voice:

'War is declared between France and Prussia!'

'We expected it; we are ready for it,' said the Princess, with all her Teutonic pride in her eyes. 'We shall show her that we cannot be insulted with impunity.'

'It is a terrible calamity for the world,' said Wanda, and her face was very pale.

The thought which was present to her was that Sabran would be foremost amidst volunteers. She did not hear a word of all the political exultation with which Princess Ottilie continued to make her militant prophecies. She shivered as with cold in the warmth of the midsummer sunset.

'War is so hideous always,' she said, remembering what it had cost her house.

The Princess demurred.

'It is not for me to say otherwise,' she objected; 'but without war all the greater virtues would die out. Your race has been always martial. You should be the last to breathe a syllable against what has been the especial glory and distinction of your forefathers. We shall avenge Jena. You should desire it, remembering Aspern and Wagram.'

'And Sadowa?' said Wanda, bitterly.

She did not reply further; she tore up the message, which had come from her cousin Kaulnitz. She slept little that night.

In two days the Princess had a brief letter from Sabran. He said: 'War is declared. It is a blunder which will perhaps cause France the loss of her existence as a nation, if the campaign be long. All the same I shall offer myself. I am not wholly a tyro in military service. I saw bloodshed in Mexico; and I fear the country will sorely need every sword she has.'

Wanda, herself, wrote back to him:

'You will do right. When a country is invaded every living man on her soil is bound to arm.'

More than that she could not say, for many of her kindred on her grandmother's side were soldiers of Germany.

But the months which succeeded those months of the 'Terrible Year,' written in letters of fire and iron on so many human hearts, were filled with a harassing anxiety to her for the sake of one life that was in perpetual peril. War had been often cruel to her house. As a child she had suffered from the fall of those she loved in the Italian campaign of Austria. Quite recently Sadowa and Königsgrätz had made her heart bleed, beholding her relatives and friends opposed in mortal conflict, and the empire she adored humbled and prostrated. Now she became conscious of a suffering as personal and almost keener. She had at the first, now and then, a hurried line from Sabran, written from the saddle, from the ambulance, beside the bivouac fire, or in the shelter of a barn. He had offered his services, and had been given the command of a volunteer cavalry regiment, all civilians mounted on their own horses, and fighting principally in the Orléannois. His command was congenial to him; he wrote cheerfully of himself, though hopelessly of his cause. The Prussians were gaining ground every day. Occasionally, in printed correspondence from the scene of war, she saw his name mentioned by some courageous action or some brilliant skirmish. That was all.

The autumn began to deepen into winter, and complete silence covered all his life. She thought with a great remorse—if he were dead? Perhaps he was dead? Why had she been always so cold to him? She suffered intensely; all the more intensely because it was not a sorrow which she could not confess even to

herself. When she ceased altogether to hear anything of or from him, she realised the hold which he had taken on her life.

These months of suspense did more to attach her to him than years of assiduous and ardent homage could have done. She, a daughter of soldiers, had always felt any man almost unmanly who had not received the baptism of fire.

Mdme. Ottilie talked of him constantly, wondered frequently if he were wounded, slain, or in prison; she never spoke his name, and dreaded to hear it.

Greswold, who perceived an anxiety in her that he did not dare to allude to, ransacked every journal that was published in German to find some trace of Sabran's name. At the first he saw often some mention of the Cuirassiers d'Orleans, and of their intrepid Colonel Commandant: some raid, skirmish, or charge in which they had been conspicuous for reckless gallantry. But after the month of November he could find nothing. The whole regiment seemed to have been obliterated from existence.

Winter settled down on Central Austria with cold silence, with roads blocked and mountains impassable. The dumbness, the solitude around her, which she had always loved so well, now grew to her intolerable. It seemed like death.

Paris capitulated. The news reached her at the hour of a violent snowstorm; the postillion of her post-sledge bringing it had his feet frozen.

Though her cousins of Lilienhöhe were amongst those who entered the city as conquerors, the fate of Paris smote her with a heavy blow. She felt as if the cold of the outer world had chilled her very bones, her very soul. The Princess, looking at her, was afraid to rejoice.

On the following day she wrote to her cousin Hugo of Lilienhöhe, who was in Paris with the Imperial Guard. She asked him to inquire for and tell her the fate of a friend, the Marquis de Sabran.

In due time Prince Hugo answered:

'The gentleman you asked for was one of the most dangerous of our enemies. He commanded a volunteer cavalry regiment, which was almost cut to pieces by the Bavarian horse in an engagement before Orleans. Two or three alone escaped; their Colonel was severely wounded in the thigh, and had his charger shot dead under him. He was taken prisoner by the Bavarians after a desperate resistance. Whilst he lay on the ground he shot three of our men with his revolver. He was sent to a fortress, I think Ehrenbreitstein, but I will inquire more particularly. I am sorry to think that you have any French friends.'

By-and-by she heard that he had been confined not at Ehrenbreitstein but at a more obscure and distant fortress on the Elbe; that his wounds had been cured, and that he would shortly be set free like other prisoners of war. In the month of March in effect

she received a brief letter from his own hand, gloomy and profoundly dejected.

'Our plans were betrayed,' he wrote. 'We were surprised and surrounded just as we had hobbled our horses and lain down to rest, after being the whole day in the saddle. Bavarian cavalry, outnumbering us four to one, attacked us almost ere we could mount our worn-out beasts. My poor troopers were cut to pieces. They hunted me down when my charger dropped, and I was made a prisoner. When they could they despatched me to one of their places on the Elbe. I have been here December and January. I am well. I suppose I must be very strong; nothing kills me. They are now about to send me back to the frontier. My beautiful Paris! What a fate! But I forget, I cannot hope for your sympathy; your kinsmen are our conquerors. I know not whether the house I lived in there exists, but if you will write me a word at Romaris, you will be merciful, and show me that you do not utterly despise a lost cause and a vanquished soldier.'

She wrote to him at Romaris, and the paper she wrote on felt her tears. In conclusion she said:

'Whenever you will, come and make sure for yourself that both the Princess Ottilie and I honour courage and heroism none the less because it is companioned by misfortune.'

But he did not come.

She understood why he did not. An infinite pity for him overflowed her heart. His public career interrupted, his country ruined, his future empty, what remained to him? Sometimes she thought, with a blush on her face, though she was all alone: 'I do.' But then, if he never came to hear that?

CHAPTER XII.

The little hamlet of Romaris, on the coast of Finisterre, was very dull and dark and silent. A few grave peasant women knitted as they walked down the beach or sat at their doors; a few children did the same. Out on the *landes* some cows were driven through the heather and broom; out on the sea some fishing-boats with rough, red sails were rocking to and fro. All was melancholy, silent, poor; life was hard at Romaris for all. The weather-beaten church looked grey and naked on a black rock; the ruins of the old *manoir* faced it amidst sands and surfs; the only thing of beauty was the bay, and that for the folk of Romaris had no beauty; they had seen it kill so many.

There was never any change at Romaris, unless it were a change in the weather, a marriage, a birth, or a death. Therefore the women and children who were knitting had lifted up

their heads as a stranger, accompanied by their priest, had come down over the black rocks, on which the church stood, towards the narrow lane that parted the houses where they clustered together face to face on the edge of the shore.

Their priest, an old man much loved by them, came slowly towards them, conversing in low tones with the stranger, who had been young and handsome, and a welcome sight, since a traveller to Romaris always needed a sailing-boat, or a rowing-boat, a guide over the moors, or a drive in an ox-waggon through the deep-cut lanes of the country.

But they had ceased to think of such things as these when the curate, with his hands extended as when he blessed them, had said in *bas* Breton as he stood beside them:

'My children, this is the last of the Sabrans of Romaris, come back to us from the far west that lies in the setting of the sun. Salute him, and show him that in Brittany we do not forget—nay, not in a hundred years.'

Many years had gone by since then, and of the last of the old race, Romaris had scarcely seen more than when he had been hidden from their sight on the other side of the heaving ocean. Sabran rarely came thither. There was nothing to attract a man who loved the world and who was sought by it, in the stormy sea coast, the strip of sea-lashed oak forest, that one tall tower with its gaunt walls of stone which was all that was left of what had once been the fortress of his race. Now and then they saw him, chiefly when he had heard that there was wild weather on the western coast, and at such times he would go out in their boats to distressed vessels, or steer through churning waters to reach a fishing-smack in trouble, with a wild courage and an almost fierce energy which made him for the moment one of themselves. But such times had been few, and all that Romaris really knew of the last marquis was that he was a gay gentleman away there in distant Paris.

He had been a mere name to them. Now and then he had sent fifty napoleons, or a hundred, to the old priest for such as were poor or sick amongst them. That was all. Now after the war he came hither. Paris had become hateful to him; his political career was ended, at all events for the time; the whole country groaned in anguish; the vices and follies that had accompanied his past life disgusted him in remembrance. He had been wounded and a prisoner; he had suffered betrayal at unworthy hands; Cochonette had sold him to the Prussians, in revenge of his desertion of her.

He was farther removed from the Countess von Szalras than ever. In the crash with which the Second Empire had fallen and sunk out of sight for evermore, his own hopes had gone down like a ship that sinks suddenly in a dark night. All his old associations were broken, half his old friends were dead or ruined:

gay châteaux that he had ever been welcome at were smoking ruins or melancholy hospitals; the past had been felled to the ground like the poor avenues of the Bois. It affected him profoundly. As far as he was capable of an impersonal sentiment he loved France, which had been for so many years his home, and which had always seemed to smile at him with indulgent kindness. Her vices, her disgrace, her feebleness, her fall, hurt him with an intense pain that was not altogether selfish, but had in it a nobler indignation, a nobler regret.

When he was released by the Prussians and sent across the frontier, he went at once to this sad sea village of Romaris, to collect as best he might the shattered fragments of his life, which seemed to him as though it had been thrown down by an earthquake. He had resigned his place as deputy when he had offered his sword to France; he had now no career, no outlet for ambition, no occupation. Many of his old friends were dead or ruined; although such moderate means as he possessed were safe, they were too slender to give him any position adequate to his rank. His old life in Paris, even if Paris arose from her tribulations, gay and glorious once more, seemed to him altogether impossible. He had lost taste for those pleasures and distractions which had before the war—or before his sojourn on the Holy Isle—seemed to him the Alpha and Omega of a man's existence. '*Que faire?*' he asked himself wearily again and again. He did not even know whether his rooms in Paris had been destroyed or spared; a few thousands of francs which he had made by a successful speculation years before, and placed in foreign funds, were all he had to live on. His keen sense told him that the opportunity which might have replaced the Bourbon throne had been lost through fatal hesitation. His own future appeared to him like a blank dead wall that rose up in front of him barring all progress; he was no longer young enough to select a career and commence it. With passionate self-reproach he lamented all the lost irrevocable years that he had wasted.

Romaris was not a place to cheer a disappointed and dejected soldier who had borne the burning pain of bodily wounds and the intolerable shame of captivity in a hostile land. Its loneliness, its darkness, its storms, its poverty, had nothing in them with which to restore his spirit to hope or his sinews to ambition. In these cold, bleak, windy days of a dreary and joyless spring-time, the dusky moors and the gruesome sea were desolate, without compensating grandeur. The people around him were all taciturn, dull, stupid; they had not suffered by the war, but they understood that, poor as they were, they would have to bear their share in the burden of the nation's ransom. They barred their doors and counted their hoarded gains in the dark with throbbing hearts, and stole out in the raw, wet, gusty dawns to kneel at the bleeding feet of their Christ. He envied them their faith; he

could not comfort them, they could not comfort him; they were too far asunder.

The only solace he had was the knowledge that he had done his duty by France, and to the memory of those whose name he bore; that he had rendered what service he could; that he had not fled from pain and peril; that he had at least worn his sword well and blamelessly; that he had not abandoned his discrowned city of pleasure in the day of humiliation and martyrdom. The only solace he had was that he felt Wanda von Szalras herself could have commanded him to do no more than he had done in this the Année Terrible.

But, though his character had been purified and strengthened by the baptism of fire, and though his egotism had been destroyed by the endless scenes of suffering and of heroism which he had witnessed, he could not in a year change so greatly that he could be content with the mere barren sense of duty done and ho ur redeemed. He was deeply and restlessly miserable. He knew not where to turn, either for occupation or for consolation. Time hung on his hands like a wearisome wallet of stones.

When all the habits of life are suddenly rent asunder, they are like a rope cut in two. They may be knotted together clumsily, or they may be thrown altogether aside and a new strand woven, but they will never be the same thing again.

Romaris, with its few wind-tortured trees and its leaden-hued dangerous seas, seemed to him, indeed, a *champ des trépassés*, as it was called, a field of death. The naked, ugly, half-ruined towers, which no ivy shrouded and no broken marble ennobled, as one or the other would have done had it been in England or in Italy, was a dreary residence for a man who was used to all the elegant and luxurious habits of a man of the world, who was also a lover of art and a collector of choice trifles. His rooms had been the envy of his friends, with all their eighteenth century furniture, and their innumerable and unclassified treasures; when he had opened his eyes of a morning a pastel of La Tour had smiled at him, rose-coloured windows had made even a grey sky smile. Without, there had been the sound of wheels going down the gay Boulevard Haussmann. All Paris had passed by, tripping and talking, careless and mirthful, beneath his gilded balconies bright with canariensis and volubilis; and on a little table, heaped in their hundreds, had been cards that bade him to all the best and most agreeable houses, whilst, betwixt them, slipped coyly in many an amorous note, many an unlooked-for declaration, many an eagerly-desired appointment.

'*Quel beau temps!*' he thought, as he awoke in the chill, bare, unlively chamber of the old tower by the sea; and it seemed to him that he must be dreaming: that all the months of the war had been a nightmare; that if he fully awakened he would find himself once more with the April sunshine shining through the

rose glass, and the carriages rolling beneath over the asphalte road. But it was no nightmare, it was a terrible, ghastly reality to him, as to so many thousands. There were the scars on his breast and his loins where the Prussian steel had hacked and the Prussian shot had pierced him; there was his sword in a corner all dinted, notched, stained; there was a crowd of hideous ineffaceable tumultuous memories; it was all true enough, only too true, and he was alone at Romaris, with all his dreams and ambitions faded into thin air, vanished like the blown burst bubbles of a child's sport.

In time to come he might recover power and nerve to recommence his struggle for distinction, but at present it seemed to him that all was over. His imprisonment had shaken and depressed him as nothing else in the trials of war could have done. He had been shut up for months alone, with his own desperation. To a man of high courage and impatient appetite for action there is no injury so great and in its effect so lasting as captivity. Joined to this he had the fever of a strong, and now perfectly hopeless, passion.

Pacing to and fro the brick floor of the tower looking down on the sands and rocks of the coast, his thoughts were incessantly with Wanda von Szalras in her stately ancient house, built so high up amidst the mountains and walled in by the great forests and the ice slopes of the glaciers. In the heat and stench of carnage he had longed for a breath of that mountain breeze, for a glance from those serene eyes; he longed for them still.

As he passed to and fro in the wild wintry weather, his heart was sick with hope deferred, with unavailing regret and repentance, with useless longings.

It was near noonday; there was no sun; a heavy wrack of cloud was sweeping up from the west; on the air the odour of rotting fish and of fish-oil, and of sewage trickling uncovered to the beach, were too strong to be driven away by the pungency of the sea.

The sea was high and moaning loud; the dusk was full of rain; the wind-tormented trees groaned and seemed to sigh; their boughs were still scarce in bud though May had come. He felt cold, weary, hopeless. His walk brought no warmth to his veins, and his thoughts none to his heart. The moisture of the air seemed to chill him to the bone, and he went within and mounted the broken granite stairs to his solitary chamber, bare of all save the simplest necessaries, gloomy and cheerless with the winds and the bats beating together at the high iron-barred casement. He wearily lighted a little oil lamp, and threw a log or two of driftwood on the hearth and set fire to them with a faggot of dried ling.

He dreaded his long lonely evening.

He had set the lamp on a table while he had set fire to the wood; its light fell palely on a small white square thing. It

was a letter. He took it up eagerly; he, who in Paris had often tossed aside, with a passing glance, the social invitations of the highest personages and the flattering words of the loveliest women.

Here, any letter seemed a friend, and as he took up this his pulse quickened; he saw that it was sealed with armorial bearings which he knew—a shield bearing three vultures with two knights as supporters, and with the motto '*Gott und mein Schwert*;' the same arms, the same motto as were borne upon the great red and gold banner floating from the keep on the north winds at the Hohenszalrasburg. He opened it with a hand which shook a little and a quick throb of pleasure at his heart. He had scarcely hoped that she would write again to him. The sight of her writing filled him with a boundless joy, the purest he had ever known called forth by the hand of woman.

The letter was brief, grave, kind. As he read he seemed to hear the calm harmonious voice of the lady of Hohenszalras speaking to him in her mellowed and softened German tongue.

She sent him words of consolation, of sympathy, of congratulation, on the course of action he had taken in a time of tribulation, which had been the touchstone of character to so many.

'Tell me something of Romaris,' she said in conclusion. 'I am sure you will grow to care for the place and the people, now that you seek both in the hour of the martyrdom of France. Have you any friends near you? Have you books? How do your days pass? How do you fill up time, which must seem so dull and blank to you after the fierce excitations and the rapid changes of war? Tell me all about your present life, and remember that we at Hohenszalras know how to honour courage and heroic misfortune.'

He laid the letter down after twice reading it. Life seemed no longer all over for him. He had earned her praise and her sympathy. It was doubtful if years of the most brilliant political successes would have done as much as his adversity, his misadventure, and his daring had done for him in her esteem. She had the blood of twenty generations of warriors in her, and nothing appealed so forcibly to her sympathies and her instincts as the heroism of the sword. Those few lines too were a permission to write to her. He replied at once, with a gratitude somewhat guardedly expressed, and with details almost wholly impersonal.

She was disappointed that he said so little of himself, but she did justice to the delicacy of the carefully guarded words from a man whose passion appealed to her by its silence, where it would only have alienated her by any eloquence. Of Romaris he said nothing, save that, had Dante ever been upon their coast, he would have added another canto to the 'Purgatorio,' more desolate and more unrelieved in gloom than any other.

'Does he regret Cochonette?' she thought, with a jealous contemptuousness of which she was ashamed as soon as she felt it.

Having once written to her, however, he thought himself privileged to write again, and did so several times. He wrote with ease, grace, and elegance: he wrote as he spoke, which gives this charm to correspondence, that while the letter is read it makes the writer seem close at hand to the reader in intimate communion. The high culture of his mind displayed itself without effort, and he had that ability of polished expression which is in our day too often a neglected one. His letters became welcome to her: she answered them briefly, but she let him see that they were agreeable to her. There was in them the note of a profound depression, of an unuttered, but suggested hopelessness which touched her. If he had expressed it in plain words, it would not have appealed to her one half so forcibly.

They remained only the letters of a man of culture to a woman capable of comprehending the intellectual movement of the time, but it was because of this limitation that she allowed them. Any show of tenderness would have both alarmed and alienated her. There was no reason after all, she thought, why a frank friendship should not exist between them.

Sometimes she was surprised at herself for having conceded so much, and angry that she had done so. Happily he had the good taste to take no advantage of it. Interesting as his letters were they might have been read from the housetops. With that inconsistency of her sex from which hitherto she had always flattered herself she had been free, she occasionally felt a passing disappointment that they were not more personal as regarded himself. Reticence is a fine quality; it is the marble of human nature. But sometimes it provokes the impatience that the marble awoke in Pygmalion.

Once only he spoke of his own aims. Then he wrote:

'You bade me do good at Romaris. Candidly, I see no way to do it except in saving a crew off a wreck, which is not an occasion that presents itself every week. I cannot benefit these people materially, since I am poor; I cannot benefit them morally, because I have not their faith in the things unseen, and I have not their morality in the things tangible. They are God-fearing, infinitely patient, faithful in their daily lives, and they reproach no one for their hard lot, cast on an iron shore and forced to win their scanty bread at risk of their lives. They do not murmur either at duty or mankind. What should I say to them? I, whose whole life is one restless impatience, one petulant mutiny against circumstance? If I talk with them I only take them what the world always takes into solitude—discontent. It would be a cruel gift, yet my hand is incapable of holding out any other. It is a homely saying that no blood comes out of a stone; so, out

of a life saturated with the ironies, the contempt, the disbelief, the frivolous philosophies, the hopeless negations of what we call society, there can be drawn no water of hope and charity, for the well-head—belief—is dried up at its source. Some pretend, indeed, to find in humanity what they deny to exist as deity, but I should be incapable of the illogical exchange. It is to deny that the seed sprang from a root; it is to replace a grand and illimitable theism by a finite and vainglorious bathos. Of all the creeds that have debased mankind, the new creed that would centre itself in man seems to me the poorest and the most baseless of all. If humanity be but a *vibrion*, a conglomeration of gases, a mere mould holding chemicals, a mere bundle of phosphorus and carbon, how can it contain the elements of worship; what matter when or how each bubble of it bursts? This is the weakness of all materialism when it attempts to ally itself with duty. It becomes ridiculous. The *carpe diem* of the classic sensualists, the morality of the "Satyricon" or the "Decamerone," are its only natural concomitants and outcome; but as yet it is not honest enough to say this. It affects the soothsayer's long robe, the sacerdotal frown, and is a hypocrite.'

In answer she wrote back to him

'I do not urge you to have my faith: what is the use? Goethe was right. It is a question between a man and his own heart. No one should venture to intrude there. But taking life even as you do, it is surely a casket of mysteries. May we not trust that at the bottom of it, as at the bottom of Pandora's, there may be hope? I wish again to think with Goethe that immortality is not an inheritance, but a greatness to be achieved like any other greatness, by courage, self-denial, and purity of purpose—a reward allotted to the just. This is fanciful, may be, but it is not illogical. And without being either a Christian or a Materialist, without beholding either majesty or divinity in humanity, surely the best emotion that our natures know—pity—must be large enough to draw us to console where we can, and sustain where we can, in view of the endless suffering, the continual injustice, the appalling contrasts, with which the world is full. Whether man be the *vibrion* or the heir to immortality, the bundle of carbon or the care of angels, one fact is indisputable: he suffers agonies, mental and physical, that are wholly out of proportion to the brevity of his life, while he is too often weighted from infancy with hereditary maladies, both of body and of character. This is reason enough, I think, for us all to help each other, even though we feel, as you feel, that we are as lost children wandering in a great darkness, with no thread or clue to guide us to the end.'

When Sabran read this answer, he mused to himself:

'Pity! how far would her pity reach? How great offences would it cover? She has compassion for the evil-doers, but it is easy, since the evil does not touch her. She sits on the high white

throne of her honour and purity, and surveys the world with beautiful but serene compassion. If the mud of its miry labyrinths reached and soiled her, would her theories prevail? They are noble, but they are the theories of one who sits in safety behind a gate of ivory and jasper, whilst outside, far below, the bitter tide of the human sea surges and moans too far off, too low down, for its sound to reach within. *Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner.* But since she would never understand, how could she ever pardon? There are things that the nature must understand rather than the mind; and her nature is as high, as calm, as pure as the snows of her high hills.'

And then the impulse came over him for a passing moment to tell her what he had never told any living creature; to make confession to her and abide her judgment, even though he should never see her face again. But the impulse shrank and died away before the remembrance of her clear, proud eyes. He could not humiliate himself before her. He would have risked her anger; he could not brave her disdain. Moreover, straight and open ways were not natural to him, though he was physically brave to folly. There was a subtlety and a reticence in him which were the enemies of candour.

To her he was more frank than to any other because her influence was great on him, and a strong reverence was awakened in him that was touched by a timid fear quite alien to a character naturally contemptuously cynical and essentially proud. But even to her he could not bring himself to be entirely truthful in revelation of his past. Truthfulness is in much a habit, and he had never acquired its habit. When he was most sincere there was always some reserve lying behind it. This was perhaps one of the causes of the attraction he exercised on all women. All women are allured by the shadows and the suggestions of what is but imperfectly revealed. Even on the clear, strong nature of Wanda von Szalras it had its unconscious and intangible charm. She herself was like daylight, but the subtle vague charm of the shadows had their seduction for her. Night holds dreams and passions that fade and flee before the lucid noon, and who at noonday wishes not for night?

For himself, the letters he received from her seemed the only things that bound him to life at all.

The betrayal of him by a base and mercenary woman had hurt him more than it was worthy to do; it had stung his pride and saddened him in this period of adversity with a sense of degradation. He had been sold by a courtesan; it seemed to him to make him ridiculous as Samson was ridiculous, and he had no gates of Gaza to pull down upon himself and her. He could only be idle, and stare at an unoccupied and valueless future. The summer went on, and he remained at Romaris. An old servant had sent him word that all his possessions were safe in Paris, and

his apartments unharmed; but he felt no inclination to go there: he felt no sympathy with Communists or Versaillists, with Gambetta or Gallifet. He stayed on at the old storm-beaten sea-washed tower, counting his days chiefly by the coming to him of any line from the castle by the lake.

She seemed to understand that and pity it, for each week brought him some tidings.

At midsummer she wrote him word that she was about to be honoured again by a two days' visit of her Imperial friends.

'We shall have, perforce, a large house-party,' she said. 'Will you be inclined this time to join it? It is natural that you should sorrow without hope for your country, but the fault of her disasters lies not with you. It is, perhaps, time that you should enter the world again; will you commence with what for two days only will be worldly—Hohenszalras? Your old friends the monks will welcome you willingly and lovingly on the Holy Isle?'

He replied with gratitude, but he refused. He did not make any plea or excuse; he thought it best to let the simple denial stand by itself. She would understand it.

'Do not think, however,' he wrote, 'that I am the less profoundly touched by your admirable goodness to a worsted and disarmed combatant in a lost cause.'

'It is the causes that are lost which are generally the noble ones,' she said in answer. 'I do not see why you should deem your life at an end because a sham empire, which you always despised, has fallen to pieces. If it had not perished by a blow from without, it would have crumbled to pieces from its own internal putrefaction.'

'The visit has passed off very well,' she continued. 'Every one was content, which shows their kindness, for these things are all of necessity so much alike that it is difficult to make them entertaining. The weather was fortunately fine, and the old house looked bright. You did rightly not to be present, if you felt festivity out of tone with your thoughts. If, however, you are ever inclined for another self-imprisonment upon the island, you know that your friends, both at the monastery and at the burg, will be glad to see you, and the monks bid me salute you with affection.'

A message from Mdme. Ottilie, a little news of the horses, a few phrases on the politics of the hour, and the letter was done. But, simple as it was, it seemed to him to be like a ray of sunshine amidst the gloom of his empty chamber.

From her the permission to return to the monastery when he would seemed to say so much. He wrote her back calm and grateful words of congratulation and cordiality; he commenced with the German formality, 'Most High Lady,' and ended them with the equally formal 'devoted and obedient servant;' but it

seemed to him as if under that cover of ceremony she must see his heart beating, his blood throbbing; she must know very well, and if knowing, she suffered him to return to the Holy Isle, why then —he was all alone, but he felt the colour rise to his face.

'And I must not go! I must not go!' he thought, and looked at his pistols.

He ought sooner to blow his brains out, and leave a written confession for her.

The hoarse sound of the sea surging amongst the rocks at the base of the tower was all that stirred the stillness; evening was spreading over all the monotonous inland country; a west wind was blowing and rustling amidst the gorse; a woman led a cow between the dolmen, stopping for it to crop grass here and there; the fishing-boats were far out to sea, hidden under the vapours and the shadows. It was all melancholy, sad-coloured, chill, lonesome. As he leaned against the embrasure of the window and looked down, other familiar scenes, long lost, rose up to his memory. He saw a wide green rolling river, long lines of willows and of larches bending under a steel-hued sky, a vast dim plain stretching away to touch blue mountains, a great solitude, a silence filled at intervals with the pathetic song of the swans, chanting sorrowfully because the nights grew cold, the ice began to gather, the food became scanty, and they were many in number.

'I must not go!' he said to himself; 'I must never see Hohenszalras.'

And he lit his study lamp, and held her letter to it and burnt it. It was his best way to do it honour, to keep it holy. He had the letters of so many worthless women locked in his drawers and caskets in his rooms in Paris. He held himself unworthy to retain hers. He had burned each written by her as it had come to him, in that sort of exaggeration of respect with which it seemed to him she was most fittingly treated by him. There are less worthy offerings than the first scruple of an unscrupulous life. It is like the first pure drops that fall from a long turbid and dust-choked fountain.

As he walked the next day upon the wind-blown, rock-strewn strip of sand that parted the old oak wood from the sea, he thought restlessly of her in those days of stately ceremony which suited her so well. What did he do here, what chance had he to be remembered by her? He chafed at his absence, yet it seemed to him impossible that he could ever go to her. What had been at first keen calculation with him had now become a finer instinct, was now due to a more delicate sentiment, a truer and loftier emotion. What could he ever look to her if he sought her but a mere base fortune-seeker, a mere liar, with no pride and no manhood in him? And what else was he? he thought, with bitterness, as he paced to and fro the rough strip of beach, with the

dusky heaving waves trembling under a cloudy sky, where a red glow told the place of the setting sun.

There were few bolder men living than he, and he was cynical and reckless before many things that most men reverence; but at the thought of her possible scorn he felt himself tremble like a child. He thought he would rather never see her face again than risk her disdain; there was in him a vague romantic wishfulness rather to die, so that she might think well of his memory, than live in her love through any baseness that would be unworthy of her.

Sin had always seemed a mere superstitious name to him, and if he had abstained from its coarser forms it had been rather from the revolt of the fine taste of a man of culture than from any principle or persuasion of duty. Men he believed were but ephemera, sporting their small hours, weaving their frail webs, and swept away by the great broom of destiny as spiders by the housewife. In the spineless doctrine of altruism he had had too robust a temperament, too clear a reason, to seek a guide for conduct. He had lived for himself, and had seen no cause to do otherwise. That he had not been more criminal had been due partly to indolence, partly to pride. In his love for Wanda von Szalras, a love with which considerable acrimony had mingled at first, he yet, through all the envy and the impatience which alloyed it, reached a moral height he had never touched before. Between her and him a great gulf yawned. He abstained from any effort to pass it. It was the sole act of self-denial of a selfish life, the sole obedience to conscience in a character which obeyed no moral laws, but was ruled by a divided tyranny of natural instinct and conventional honour.

The long silent hours of thought in the willow-shaded cloisters of the Holy Isle had not been wholly without fruit. He desired, with passion and sincerity, that she should think well of him, but he did not dare to wish for more; love offered from him to her seemed to him as if it would be a kind of blasphemy. He remembered in his far-off childhood, which at times still seemed so near to him, nearer than all that was around him, the vague, awed, wistful reverence with which he had kneeled in solitary hours before the old dim picture of the Madonna with the lamp burning above it, a little golden flame in the midst of the gloom; he remembered so well how his fierce young soul and his ignorant yearning child's heart had gone out in a half-conscious supplication, how it had seemed to him that if he only knelt long enough, prayed well enough, she would come down to him and lay her hands on him. It was all so long ago, yet, when he thought of Wanda von Szalras, something of that same emotion rose up in him, something of the old instinctive worship awoke in him. In thought he prostrated himself once more whenever the memory of her came to him. He had no religion; she became one to him.

Meanwhile, he was constantly thinking restlessly to himself, 'Did I do ill not to go?'

His bodily life was at Romaris, but his mental life was at Hohenszalras. He was always thinking of her as she would look in those days of the Imperial visit; he could see the stately ceremonies of welcome, the long magnificence of the banquets, the great Rittersäal with cressets of light blazing on its pointed emblazoned roofs; he could see her as she would move down the first quadrille which she would dance with her Kaiser: she would wear her favourite ivory-white velvet most probably, and her wonderful old jewels, and all her orders. She would look as if she had stepped down off a canvas of Velasquez or Vandyck, and she would be a little tired, a little contemptuous, a little indifferent, despite her loyalty; she would be glad, he knew, when the brilliant gathering was broken up, and the old house, and the yew terrace, and the green lake were all once more quiet beneath the rays of the watery moon. She was so unlike other women. She would not care about a greatness, a compliment, a success more or less. Such triumphs were for the people risen yesterday, not for a Countess von Szalras.

He knew the simplicity of her life and the pride of her temper, and they moved him to the stronger admiration because he knew also that those mere externals which she held in contempt had for him an exaggerated value. He was scarcely conscious himself of how great a share the splendour of her position, united to her great indifference to it, had in the hold she had taken on his imagination and his passions. He did know that there were so much greater nobilities in her that he was vaguely ashamed of the ascendency which her mere rank took in his thoughts of her. Yet he could not divest her of it, and it seemed to enhance both her bodily and spiritual beauty, as the golden calyx of the lily makes its whiteness seem the whiter by its neighbourhood.

CHAPTER XIII.

In the Iselthal the summer was more brilliant and warm than usual. The rains were less frequent, and the roses on the great sloping lawns beneath the buttresses and terraces of Hohenszalras were blooming freely.

Their mistress did not for once give them much heed. She rode long and fast through the still summer woods, and came back after nightfall. Her men of business, during their interviews with her, found her attention less perfect, her interest less keen. In stormy days she sat in the library, and read Heine and Schiller often, and all the philosophers and men of science rarely. A

great teacher has said that the Humanities must outweigh the Sciences at all times, and he is unquestionably true, if it were only for the reason that in the sweet wise lore of ages every human heart in pain and perplexity finds a refuge; whilst in love or in sorrow the sciences seem the poorest and chilliest of mortal vanities that ever strove to measure the universe with a foot-rule.

The Princess watched her with wistful, inquisitive eyes, but dared not name the person of whom they both thought most. Wanda was herself intolerant of the sense of impatience with which she awaited the coming of the sturdy pony that brought the post-bag from Windisch-Matrey. He in his loneliness and emptiness of life on the barren sea-shore of Romaris did not more anxiously await her letters than did the châtelaine of Hohenszalras, amidst all her state, her wealth, and her innumerable occupations, await his. She pitied him intensely; there was something pathetic to her in the earnestness with which he had striven to amend his ways of life, only to have his whole career shattered by an insensate and unlooked-for national war. She understood that his poverty stood in the path of his ambition, and she divined that his unhappiness had broken that spring of manhood in him which would have enabled him to construct a new career for himself out of the ruins of the old. She understood why he was listless and exhausted.

There were moments when she was inclined to send him some invitation more cordial, some bidding more clear; but she hesitated to take a step which would bind her in her own honour to so much more. She knew that she ought not to suggest a hope to which she was not prepared to give full fruition. And again, how could he respond? It would be impossible for him to accept. She was one of the great alliances of Europe, and he was without fortune, without career, without a future. Even friendship was only possible whilst they were far asunder.

Two years had gone by since he had come across from the monastery in the green and gold of a summer afternoon. The monks had not forgotten him; throughout the French war they had prayed for him. When their Prior saw her, he said anxiously sometimes: 'And the Markgraf von Sabran, will he never come to us again? Were we too dull for him? Will your Excellency remember us to him, if ever you can?' And she had answered with a strange emotion at her heart: 'His country is in trouble, holy father; a good son cannot leave his land in her adversity. No: I do not think he was dull with you; he was quite happy, I believe. Perhaps he may come again some day, who knows? He shall be told what you say.'

Then a vision would rise up to her of herself and him, as they would be perhaps when they should be quite old. Perhaps he would retire into this holy retreat of the Augustines, and she

would be a grave sombre woman, not gay and pretty and witty, as the Princess was. The picture was gloomy; she chased it away, and galloped her horse long and far through the forests.

The summer had been so brilliant that the autumn which followed was cold and severe, earlier than usual, and heavy storms swept over the Tauern, almost ere the wheat harvest could be reaped. Many days were cheerless and filled only with the sound of incessant rains. In the Pinzgau and the Salzkammergut floods were frequent. The Ache and the Szalzach, with all their tributary streams and wide and lonely lakes, were carrying desolation and terror into many parts of the land which in summer they made beautiful. Almost every day brought her some tidings of some misfortunes in the villages on the farms belonging to her in the more distant parts of Austria; a mill washed away, a bridge down, a dam burst, a road destroyed, a harvest swept into the water, some damage or other done by the swollen river and torrents, she heard of by nearly every communication that her stewards and her lawyers made to her at this season.

'Our foes the rivers are more insidious than your mighty enemy the salt water,' she wrote to Romaris. 'The sea deals open blows, and men know what they must expect if they go out on the vasty deep. But here a little brook that laughed and chirped at noon-day as innocently as a child may become at nightfall or dawn a roaring giant, devouring all that surrounds him. We pay heavily for the glory of our mountain waters.'

These autumn weeks seemed very dreary to her. She visited her horses chafing at inaction in their roomy stalls, and attended to her affairs, and sat in the library or the octagon room hearing the rain beat against the emblazoned leaded panes, and felt the days, and above all the evenings, intolerably dull and melancholy. She had never heeded rain before, or minded the change of season.

One Sunday a messenger rode through the drenching storm, and brought her a telegram from her lawyer in Salzburg. It said: Idrac flooded: many lives lost: great distress: fear town wholly destroyed. Please send instructions.'

The call for action roused her as a trumpet sounding rouses a cavalry charger.

Instructions!' she echoed as she read. 'They write as if I could bid the Danube subside, or the Drave shrink in its bed!'

She penned a hasty answer.

'I will go to Idrac myself.'

Then she sent a messenger also to S. Johann im Wald for a special train to be got in readiness for her, and told one of her women and a trusty servant to be ready to go with her to Vienna in an hour. It was still early in the forenoon.

'Are you mad?' cried Madame Ottilie, when she was informed of the intended journey.

Wanda kissed her hand.

'There is no madness in what I shall do, dear mother, and Bela surely would have gone.'

'Can you stay the torrents of heaven? Can you arrest a river in its wrath?'

'No; but lives are often lost because poor people lose their senses in fright. I shall be calmer than any one there. Besides, the place belongs to us; we are bound to share its danger. If only Egon were not away from Hungary!'

'But he is away. You have driven him away.'

'Do not dissuade me, dearest mother. It would be cowardice not to go.'

'What can women do in such extremities?'

'But we of Hohenszalras must not be mere women when we are wanted in any danger. Remember Luitgarde von Szalras, the *kuttengeier*.'

The Princess sighed, prayed, even wept, but Wanda was gently inflexible. The Princess could not see why a precious life should be endangered for the sake of a little half-barbaric, half-Jewish town, which was remarkable for nothing except for shipping timber and selling *salbling*. The population was scarcely Christian, so many Hebrews were there, and so benighted were the Sclavonian poor, who between them made up the two thousand odd souls that peopled Idrac. To send a special messenger there, and to give any quantity of money that the distress of the moment might demand, would be all right and proper; indeed, an obligation on the owner of the little feudal riverside town. But to go! A Countess von Szalras to go in person where not one out of a hundred of the citizens had been properly baptised or confirmed! The Princess could not view this Quixotism in any other light than that of an absolute insanity.

'Bela lost his life in just such a foolish manner!' she pleaded.

'So did the saints, dear mother,' said his sister, gently.

The Princess coloured and coughed.

'Of course, I am aware that many holy lives have been—have been—what appears to our finite senses wasted,' she said, with a little asperity. 'But I am also aware, Wanda, that the duties most neglected are those which lie nearest home and have the least display; consideration for *me* might be better, though less magnificent, than so much heroism for Idrac.'

'It pains me that you should put it in that light, dearest mother,' said Wanda, with inexhaustible patience. 'Were you in any danger I would stay by you first, of course; but you are in none. These poor, forlorn, ignorant, cowardly creatures are in the very greatest. I draw large revenues from the place; I am in honour bound to share its troubles. Pray do not seek to dissuade me. It is a matter not of caprice but of conscience. I shall be in no possible peril myself. I shall go down the river in my own vessel, and I will telegraph to you from every town at which I touch.'

The Princess ceased not to lament, to oppose, to bemoan her own powerlessness to check intolerable follies. Sitting in her easy chair in her warm blue-room, sipping her chocolate, the woes of a distant little place on the Danube, whose population was chiefly Semitic, were very bearable and altogether failed to appeal to her.

Wanda kissed her, asked her blessing humbly, and took her way in the worst of a blinding storm along the unsafe and precipitous road which went over the hills to Windisch-Matrey.

'What false sentiment it all is!' thought the Princess, left alone. 'She has not seen this town since she was ten years old. She knows that they are nearly all Jews, or quite heathenish Sclavonians. She can do nothing at all—what should a woman do?—and yet she is so full of her conscience that she goes almost to the Iron Gates in quest of a duty in the wettest of weather, while she leaves a man like Egon and a man like Sabran wretched for want of a word! I must say,' thought the Princess, 'false sentiment is almost worse than none at all!'

The rains were pouring down from leaden skies, hiding all the sides of the mountains and filling the valleys with masses of vapour. The road was barely passable; the hill torrents dashed across it; the little brooks were swollen to water-courses; the protecting wall on more than one giddy height had been swept away; the gallop of the horses shook the frail swaying galleries and hurled the loosened stones over the precipice with loud resounding noise. The drive to Matrey and thence with post-horses to S. Johann im Wald, the nearest railway station, was in itself no little peril, but it was accomplished before the day had closed in, and the special train she had ordered being in readiness left at once for Vienna, running through the low portions of the Pinzgau, which were for the most part under water.

All the way was dim and watery, and full of the sound of running or of falling water. The Ache and the Szalzach, both always deep and turbulent rivers, were swollen and boisterous, and swirled and thundered in their rocky beds; in the grand Pass of Lueg the gloom, always great, was dense as at midnight, and when they reached Salzburg the setting sun was bursting through ink-black clouds, and shed a momentary glow as of fire upon the dark sides of the Untersberg, and flamed behind the towers of the great castle on its rocky throne. All travellers know the grandeur of that scene; familiar as it was to her she looked upward at it with awe and pleasure commingled. Salzburg in the evening light needs Salvator Rosa and Rembrandt together to portray it.

The train only paused to take in water; the station was crowded as usual, set as it is between the frontiers of empire and kingdom, but in the brief interval she saw one whom she recognised amongst the throng, and she felt the colour come into her own face as she did so.

She saw Sabran; he did not see her. Her train moved out of the station rapidly, to make room for the express from Munich; the sun dropped down into the ink-black clouds; the golden and crimson pomp of Untersberg changed to black and grey; the ivory and amber and crystal of the castle became stone and brick and iron, that frowned sombrely over a city sunk in river-mists and in rain-vapours. She felt angrily that there was an affinity between the landscape and herself; that so, at sight of him, a light had come into her life which had no reality in fact, prismatic colours baseless as a dream.

She had longed to speak to him; to stretch out her hand to him; to say at least how her thoughts and her sympathies had been with him throughout the war. But her carriage was already in full onward movement, and in another moment had passed at high speed out of the station into that grand valley of the Szalzach where Hohenszalzburg seems to tower as though Friederich Barbarossa did indeed sleep there. With a sigh she sank backward amongst her furs and cushions, and saw the soaring fortress pass into the clouds.

The night had now closed in; the rain fell heavily. As the little train, oscillating greatly from its lightness, swung over the iron rails, there was a continual sound of splashing water audible above the noise of the wheels and the throb of the engine. She had often travelled at night and had always slept soundly; this evening she could not sleep. She remained wide awake watching the swaying of the lamp, listening to the shrill shriek of the wheels as they rushed through water where some hillside brook had broken bounds and spread out in a shallow lagoon. The skies were overcast in every direction; the rain was everywhere unceasing; the night seemed to her very long.

She pondered perpetually on his presence at Salzburg, and wondered if he were going to the Holy Isle. Three months had gone by since she had sent him the semi-invitation to her country.

The train sped on; the day dawned; she began to get glimpses of the grand blue river, now grey and ochre-coloured and thick with mud, its turbid waves heaving sullenly under the stormy October skies. She had always loved the great Donau; she knew its cradle well in the north land of the Teutons. She had often watched the baby-stream rippling over the stones, and felt the charm, as of some magical transformation, as she thought of the same stream stretching broadly under the monastic walls of Klosterneuberg, rolling in tempest by the Iron Gates, and gathering its mighty volume higher and deeper to burst at last into the sunlight of the eastern sea. Amidst the levelled monotony of modern Europe the Danube keeps something of savage grandeur, something of legendary power, something of Oriental charm; it is still often tameless, a half-barbaric thing, still a Tamerlane amidst

rivers: and yet yonder at its birthplace it is such a slender thread of rippling water! She and Bela had crossed it with bare feet to get forget-me-nots in Taunus, talking together of Chriemhilde and her pilgrimage to the land of the Huns.

The little train swung on steadily through the water above and below, and after a night of no little danger came safely to Vienna as the dawn broke. She went straight to her yacht, which was in readiness off the Lobau, and weighed anchor as the pale and watery morning broadened into day above the shores that had seen Aspern and Wagram. The yacht was a yawl, strongly built and drawing little water, made on purpose for the ascent and descent of the Danube, from Passau up in the north to as far south as the Bosphorus if needed. The voyage had been one of the greatest joys of hers and of Bela's childhood; they had read on deck alternately the 'Nibelungen-Lied' and the 'Arabian Nights,' clinging together in delighted awe as they passed through the darkness of the defile of Kasan.

Idrac was situated between Pesth and Peterwardein, lying low on marshy ground that was covered with willows and intersected by small streams flowing from the interior to the Danube.

The little town gave its name and its seigneurie to the owner of its burg; an ancient place built on a steep rock that rose sheer out of the fast-running waves, and dominated the passage of the stream. The Counts of Idrac had been exceedingly powerful in the old times, when they had stopped at their will the right of way of the river; and their appanages with their title had come by marriage into the House of Szalras some four centuries before, and although the dominion over the river was gone, the fortress and the little town and all that appertained thereto still formed a considerable possession; it had usually been given with its Countship to the second son of the Szalras.

Making the passage to Pesth in fourteen hours, the yacht dropped anchor before the Franz Josef Quai as the first stars came out above the Blocksburg, for by this time the skies had lightened and the rains had ceased. Here she stayed the night perforce, as an accident had occurred to the machinery of the vessel. She did not leave the yacht, but sent into the inner city for stores of provisions and of the local cordial, the *slibowitza*, to distribute to the half-drowned people amongst whom she was about to go. It was noonday before the yawl got under weigh and left the twin-towns behind her. A little way farther down the stream they passed a great castle, standing amidst beech woods on a rock that rose up from fields covered with the Carlowitz vine. She looked at it with a sigh: it was the fortress of Kohacs, one of the many possessions of Egon Vàsàrhely.

The weather had now cleared, but the skies were overcast, and the plains, which began to spread away monotonously from either shore, were covered with white fog. Soon the fog spread also

over the river, and the yacht was compelled to advance cautiously and slowly, so that the voyage was several hours longer than usual. When the light of the next day broke they had come in sight of the flooded districts on their right: the immense flat fields that bore the flax and grain which make the commerce of Baja, of Neusatz, and of other riverain towns, were all changed to shallow estuaries. The Theiss, the Drave, and many minor streams, swollen by the long autumnal rains, had burst their boundaries and laid all the country under water for hundreds of square leagues. The granaries, freshly filled with the late abundant harvest, had at many places been flooded or destroyed: thousands of stacks of grain were floating like shapeless, dismasted vessels. Timber and the thatched roofs of the one-storied houses were in many places drifting too, like the flotsam and the hulls of wrecked ships.

There are few scenes more dreary, more sad, more monotonous than those of a flat country swamped by flood: the sky above them was leaden and heavy, the Danube beneath them was turgid and discoloured; the shrill winds whistled through the brakes of willow, the water-birds, frightened, flew from their osier-beds on the islands, the bells of churches and watch-towers tolled dismally.

It was late in the afternoon when she came within sight of her little town on the Sclavonian shore, which Ernst von Szalras had fired on August 29, 1526, to save it from the shame of violation by the Turks. Though he had perished, and most of the soldiers and townsfolk with him, the fortress, the *têtes du pont*, and the old water-gates and walls had been too strong for the flames to devour, and the town had been built up again by the Turks and subsequently by the Hungarians.

The slender minarets of the Ottomans' two mosques still raised themselves amidst the old Gothic architecture of the mediæval buildings, and the straw-covered roofs and the white-plastered walls of the modern houses. As they steamed near it the minarets and the castle towers rose above what looked a world of waters, all else seemed swallowed in the flood; the orchards, which had surrounded all save the river-side of the town, were immersed almost to the summits of their trees. The larger vessels could never approach Idrac in ordinary times, the creek being too shallow on which it stood; but now the water was so high that though it would be too imprudent to anchor there, the yacht easily passed in, and hove-to underneath the water-walls, a pilot taking careful soundings as they steered. It was about three in the afternoon. The short, grey day was near its end; a shout of welcome rose from some people on the walls as they recognised the build and the ensign of the yawl. Some crowded boats were pulling away from the town, laden with fugitives and their goods.

'How soon people run away! They are like rats,' she thought.

'I would sooner be like the stork, and not quit my nest if it were in flames.'

She landed at the water-stairs of the castle. Men, women, and children came scrambling along the walls, where they were huddled together out of temporary reach of the flood, and threw themselves down at her feet and kissed her skirts with abject servility. They were half mad with terror, and amongst the population there were many hundreds of Jews, the most cowardly people in all the world. The boats were quite inadequate in number to the work they had to do; the great steamers passing up and down did not pause to help them; the flood was so general below Pesth that on the right shore of the river each separate village and township was busy with its own case and had no help for neighbours: the only aid came from those on the opposite shore, but that was scanty and unwisely ministered. The chief citizens of Idrac had lost their wits, as she had foreseen they would do. To ring the bells madly night and day, and fire off the old culverins from the water-gate, was all they seemed to know how to do. They told her that many lives had been lost, as the inland waters had risen in the night, and most of the houses were of only one story. In the outlying flax-farms it was supposed that whole households had perished. In the town itself there were six feet of water everywhere, and many of the inhabitants were huddled together in the two mosques, which were now granaries, in the towers, and in the fortress itself; but several families had been enabled to escape, and had climbed upon the roofs, clinging to the chimneys for bare life.

Her mere presence brought reviving hope and energy to the primitive population. Their Lady had a romantic legendary reputation amongst them, and they were ready to cling round the pennon of the yacht as their ancestors had rallied round the standard of Ernst von Szalras.

She ascended to the Rittersäal of the fortress, and assembled a few of the men about her, who had the most influence and energy in the little place. She soon introduced some kind of system and method into the efforts made, promised largesse to those who should be the most active, and had the provisions she had brought distributed amongst those who most needed them. The boats of the yawl took many away to a temporary refuge on the opposite shore. Many others were brought in to the state-room of the castle for shelter. Houses were constantly falling, undermined by the water, and there were dead and wounded to be attended to, as well as the hungry and terrified living creatures. Once before, Idrac had been thus devastated by flood, but it had been far away in the previous century, and the example was too distant to have been a warning to the present generation.

She passed a fatiguing and anxious night. It was impossible to think of sleep with so much misery around. The yacht was

obliged to descend the river for safe anchorage, but the boats remained. She went herself, now in one, now in another, to endeavour to inspire the paralysed people with some courage and animation. A little wine, a little bread, were all she took; food was very scarce. The victuals of the yacht's provisioning did not last long amongst so many famishing souls. She ordered her skipper at dawn to go down as far as Neusatz and purchase largely. There were five thousand people, counting those of the neighbourhood, or more, homeless and bereft of all shelter. The telegraph was broken, the poles had been snapped by the force of the water in many places.

With dawn a furious storm gathered and broke, and renewed rains added their quota to the inundation and their discomfort to the exposed sufferers. The cold was great, and the chill that made them shudder from head to foot was past all cure by cordials. She regretted not to have brought Greswold with her. She was indifferent to danger, indefatigable in exertion, and strong as Libussa, brave as Chriemhilde. Because the place belonged to her in almost a feudal manner, she held herself bound to give her life for it if need be. Bela would have done what she was doing.

Twice or thrice during the two following days she heard the people speak of a stranger who had arrived fifteen hours before her, and had wrought miracles of deliverance. Unless the stories told her were greatly exaggerated, this foreigner had shown a courage and devotion quite unequalled. He had thrown himself into the work at once on his arrival there in a boat from Neusatz, and had toiled night and day, enduring extreme fatigue and running almost every hour some dire peril of his life. He had saved whole families of the poorest and most wretched quarter; he had sprung on the roofs that were splitting and sinking, on to walls that were trembling and tottering, and had borne away in safety men, women, and children, the old, and the sick, and the very animals; he had infused some of his own daring and devotedness into the selfish and paralysed Hebrew population; priests and rabbis were alike unanimous in his praise, and she, as she heard, felt that he who had fought for France had been here for her sake. They told her that he was now out amongst the more distant orchards and fields, amidst the flooded farms where the danger was even greater than in the town itself. Some Czechs said that he was S. John of Nepomuc himself. She bade them bring him to her, that she might thank him, whenever he should enter the town again, and then thought of him no more.

Her whole mind and feeling were engrossed by the spectacle of a misery that even all her wealth could not do very much to alleviate. The waters as yet showed no sign of abatement. The crash of falling houses sounded heavily ever and again through the gloom. The melancholy sight of humble household things, of

drowned cattle, of dead dogs, borne down the discoloured flood out to the Danube renewed itself every hour. The lamentations of the ruined people went up in an almost continuous wail like the moaning of a winter wind. There was nothing grand, nothing picturesque, nothing exciting to redeem the dreariness and the desolation. It was all ugly, miserable, dull. It was more trying than war, which even in its hideous senselessness lends a kind of brutal intoxication to all whom it surrounds.

She was incessantly occupied and greatly fatigued, so that the time passed without her counting it. She sent a message each day to the Princess at home, and promised to return as soon as the waters had subsided and the peril passed. For the first time in her life she experienced real discomfort, real privation; she had surrendered nearly all the rooms in the burg to the sick people, and food ran short and there was none of good quality, though she knew that supplies would soon come from the steward at Kohacs and by the yacht.

On the fourth day the waters had sunk an inch. As she heard the good tidings she was looking out inland over the waste of grey and yellow flood; a Jewish rabbi was beside her speaking of the exertions of the stranger, in whom the superstitious of the townsfolk saw a saint from heaven.

'And does no one even know who he is?' she asked.

'No one has asked,' answered the Jew. 'He has been always out where the peril was greatest.'

'How came he here?'

'He came by one of the big steamers that go to Turkey. He pulled himself here in a little boat that he had bought; the boat in which he has done such good service.'

'What is he like in appearance?'

'He is very tall, very fair, and handsome; I should think he is northern.'

Her pulse beat quicker for a moment; then she rejected the idea as absurd, though indeed, she reflected, she had seen him at Salzburg.

'He must at least be a brave man,' she said, quietly. 'If you see him bring him to me that I may thank him. Is he in the town now?'

'No; he is yonder, where the Rathwand farms are, or were; where your Excellency sees those dark, long islands which are not islands at all, but only the summits of cherry orchards. He has carried the people away, carried them down to Peterwardein; and he is now about to try and rescue some cattle which were driven up on to the roof of a tower, poor beasts—that tower to the east there, very far away: it is five miles as the crow flies.'

'I suppose he will come into the town again?'

'He was here last night; he had heard of your Excellency, and asked for her health.'

'Ah! I will see and thank him if he come again.'

But no one that day saw the stranger in Idrac.

The rains fell again and the waters again rose. The maladies which come of damp and of bad exhalations spread amongst the people; they could not all be taken to other villages or towns, for there was no room for them. She had quinine, wines, good food ordered by the great steamers, but they were not yet arrived. What could be got at Neusatz or Peterwardein the yacht brought, but it was not enough for so many sick and starving people. The air began to grow fœtid from the many carcases of animals, though as they floated the vultures from the hills fed on them. She had a vessel turned into a floating hospital, and the most delicate of the sick folk carried to it, and had it anchored off the nearest port. Her patience, her calmness, and her courage did more to revive the sinking hearts of the homeless creatures than the cordials and the food. She was all day long out in her boat, being steered from one spot to another. At night she rested little and passed from one sick bed to another. She had never been so near to hopeless human misery before. At Hohenszalras no one was destitute.

One twilight hour on the ninth day, as she was rowed back to the castle stairs, she passed another boat in which were two lads and a man. The man was rowing, a dusky shadow in the gloom of the wet evening and the uncouthness of his waterproof pilot's dress; but she had a lantern beside her, and she flashed its light full on the boat as it passed her. When she reached the burg, she said to her servant Anton: 'Herr von Sabran is in Idrac; go and say that I desire to see him.'

Anton, who remembered him well, returned in an hour, and said he could neither find him nor hear of him.

All the night long, a cheerless tedious night, with the rain falling without and the storm that was raging in the Bosphorus sending its shrill echoes up the Danube, she sat by the beds of the sick women or paced up and down the dimly-lit Rittersäal in an impatience which it humiliated her to feel. It touched her that he should be here, so silently, so sedulously avoiding her, and doing so much for the people of Idrac, because they were her people. The old misgiving that she had been ungenerous in her treatment of him returned to her. He seemed always to have the finer part—the *beau rôle*. To her, royal in giving, imperious in conduct, it brought a sense of failure, of inferiority. As she read the Psalms in Hungarian to the sick Magyar women, her mind perpetually wandered away to him.

She did not see Sabran again, but she heard often of him. The fair stranger, as the people called him, was always conspicuous wherever the greatest danger was to be encountered. There was always peril in almost every movement where the undermined houses, the tottering walls, the stagnant water, the fever-reeking

marshes presented at every turn a perpetual menace to life. 'He is not vainly *un fils des preux*,' she thought, with a thrill of personal pride, as if some one near and dear to her were praised, as she listened to the stories of his intrepidity and his endurance. Whole nights spent in soaked clothes, in half swamped boats; whole days lost in impotent conflict with the ignorance or the poltroonery of an obstinate populace, continual risk encountered without counting its cost to rescue some poor man's sick beast, or pull a cripple from beneath falling beams, or a lad from choking mud; hour on hour of steady laborious rowing, of passage to and fro the sullen river with a freight of moaning, screaming peasantry—this was not child's play, nor had it any of the animation and excitation which in war or in adventure make of danger a strong wine that goes merrily and voluptuously to the head. It was all dull, stupid, unlovely, and he had come to it for her sake. For her sake certainly, though he never approached her; though when Anton at last found and took her message to him he excused himself from obedience to it by a plea that he was at that moment wet and weary, and had come from a hut where typhoid raged. She understood the excuse; she knew that he knew well she was no more afraid than he of that contagion. She admired him the more for his isolation; in these grey, rainy, tedious, melancholy days his figure seemed to grow into a luminous heroic shape like one of the heroes of the olden time. If he had once seemed to seek a guerdon for it the spell would have been broken. But he never did. She began to believe that such a knight deserved any recompense which she could give.

'Egon himself could have done no more,' she said in her own thoughts; and it was the highest praise that she could give to any man, for her Magyar cousin was the embodiment of all martial daring, of all chivalrous ardour, and had led his glittering hussars down on to the French bayonets, as on to the Prussian Krupp guns, with a fury that bore all before it, impetuous and irresistible as a stream of fired naphtha.

On the twelfth morning the river had sunk so much lower that the yacht arriving with medicines and stores of food from Neusatz signalled that she could not enter the creek on which Idrac stood, and waited orders. It had ceased to rain, but the winds were still strong and the skies heavy. She descended to her boat at the water-gate, and told the men to take her out to the yacht. It was early, the sun behind the clouds had barely climbed above the distant Wallachian woods, and the scene had lost nothing of its melancholy. A man was standing on the water-stairs as she descended them, and turned rapidly away, but she had seen him, and stretched out her long staff and touched him lightly.

'Why do you avoid me?' she said, as he uncovered his head; 'my men sought you in all directions; I wished to thank you.'

He bowed low over the hand she held out to him. 'I ven-

tured to be near at hand to be of use,' he answered. 'I was afraid the exposure, and the damp, and all this pestilence would make you ill: you are not ill?'

'No; I am quite well. I have heard of all your courage and endurance. Idrac owes you a great debt.'

'I only pay my debt to Hohenszalras.'

They were both silent; a certain constraint was upon them both.

'How did you know of the inundation? It was unkind of you not to come to me,' she said, and her voice was unsteady as she spoke. 'I want so much to tell you, better than letters can do, all that we felt for you throughout that awful war.'

He turned away slightly with a shudder. 'You are too good. Thousands of men much better than I suffered much more.'

The tears rose to her eyes as she glanced at him. He was looking pale and worn. He had lost the graceful *insouciance* of his earlier manner. He looked grave, weary, melancholy, like a man who had passed through dire disaster, unspeakable pain, and had seen his career snapped in two like a broken wand. But there was about him instead something soldierlike, proven, war-worn, which became him in her eyes, daughter of a race of warriors as she was.

'You have much to tell me, and I have much to hear,' she said, after a pause. 'You should have come to the monastery to be cured of your wounds. Why were you so mistrustful of our friendship?'

He coloured and was silent.

'Indeed,' she said gravely, 'we can honour brave men in the Tauern and in Idrac too. You are very brave. I do not know how to thank you for my people or for myself.'

'Pray do not speak so,' he said, in a very low voice. 'To see you again would be recompense for much worthier things than any I have done.'

'But you might have seen me long ago,' she said, with a certain nervousness new to her, 'had you only chosen to come to the Isle. I asked you twice.'

He looked at her with eyes of longing and pathetic appeal.

'Do not tempt me,' he murmured. 'If I yielded, and if you despised me——'

'How could I despise one who has so nobly saved the lives of my people?'

'You would do so.'

He spoke very low: he was silent a little while, then he said very softly:

'One evening, when we spoke together on the terrace at Hohenszalras, you leant your hand upon the ivy there. I plucked the leaf you touched; you did not see. I had the leaf with me all through the war. It was a talisman. It was like a holy

thing. When your cousins' soldiers stripped me in their ambulance, they took it from me.'

His voice faltered. She listened and was moved to a profound emotion.

'I will give you something better,' she said very gravely. He did not ask her what she would give.

She looked away from him awhile, and her face flushed a little. She was thinking of what she would give him; a gift so great that the world would deem her mad to bestow it, and perhaps would deem him dishonoured to take it.

'How did you hear of these floods along the Danube?' she asked him, recovering her wonted composure.

'I read about them in telegrams in Paris,' he made answer. 'I had mustered courage to revisit my poor Paris; all I possess is there. Nothing has been injured; a shell burst quite close by but did not harm my apartments. I went to make arrangements for the sale of my collections, and on the second day that I arrived there I saw the news of the inundations of Idrac and the lower Danubian plains. I remembered the name of the town; I remembered it was yours. I remembered your saying once that where you had feudal rights you had feudal duties, so I came on the chance of being of service.'

'You have been most devoted to the people.'

'The people! What should I care though the whole town perished? Do not attribute to me a humanity that is not in my nature.'

'Be as cynical as you like in words so long as you are heroic in action. I am going out to the yacht; will you come with me?'

He hesitated. 'I merely came to hear from the warder of your health. I am going to catch the express steamer at Neusatz; all danger is over.'

'The yacht can take you to Neusatz. Come with me.'

He did not offer more opposition; he accompanied her to the boat and entered it.

The tears were in her eyes. She said nothing more, but she could not forget that scores of her own people here had owed their lives to his intrepidity and patience, and that he had never hesitated to throw his life into the balance when needed. And it had been done for her sake alone. The love of humanity might have been a nobler and purer motive, but it would not have touched her so nearly as the self-abandonment of a man by nature selfish and cold.

In a few moments they were taken to the yawl. He ascended the deck with her.

The tidings the skipper brought, the examination of the stores, the discussion of ways and means, the arrangements for the general relief, were all dull, practical matters that claimed careful attention and thought. She sat in the little cabin that was brave with

marqueterie work and blue satin and Dresden mirrors, and made memoranda and calculations, and consulted him, and asked his advice on this, on that. The government official, sent to make official estimates of the losses in the township, had come on board to salute and take counsel with her. The whole forenoon passed in these details. He wrote, and calculated, and drew up reports for her. No more tender or personal word was spoken between them; but there was a certain charm for them both in this intimate intercourse, even though it took no other shape than the study of how many boatloads of wheat were needed for so many hundred people, of how many florins a day might be passed to the head of each family, of how many of the flooded houses would still be serviceable with restoration, of how many had been entirely destroyed, of how the town would best be rebuilt, and of how the inland rivers could best be restrained in the future.

To rebuild it she estimated that she would have to surrender for five years the revenues from her Galician and Hungarian mines, and she resolved to do it altogether at her own cost. She had no wish to see the town figure in public prints as the object of public subscription.

'I am sure all my woman friends,' she said, 'would kindly make it occasion for a fancy fair or a lottery (with new costumes) in Vienna, but I do not care for that sort of thing, and I can very well do what is needed alone.'

He was silent. He had always known that her riches were great, but he had never realised them as fully as he now did when she spoke of rebuilding an entire town as she might have spoken of building a carriage.

'You would make a good prime minister,' she said, smiling; 'you have the knowledge of a specialist on so many subjects.'

At noon they served her a little plain breakfast of Danubian *salbling*, with Carlowitzer wine and fruit sent by the steward of Mohacs. She bade him join her in it.

'Had Egon himself been here he could not have done more for Idrac than you have done,' she said.

'Is this Prince Egon's wine?' he said abruptly, and on hearing that it was so, he set the glass down untasted.

She looked surprised, but she did not ask him his reason, for she divined it. There was an exaggeration in the unspoken hostility more like the days of Arthur and Lancelot than their own, but it did not displease her.

They were both little disposed to converse during their meal; after the dreary and terrible scenes they had been witness of, the atmosphere of life seems grave and dark even to those whom the calamity has not touched. The most careless spirit is oppressed by a sense of the precariousness and the cruelty of existence.

When they ascended to the deck the skies were lighter than they had been for many weeks; the fog had cleared, so that, in

the distance, the towers of Neusatz and the fortress of Peterwardein were visible; vapour still hung over the vast Hungarian plain, but the Danube was clear and the affluents of it had sunk to their usual level.

'You really go to-night?' she said, as they looked down the river.

'There is no need for me to stay; the town is safe, and you are well, you say. If there be anything I can still do, command me.'

She smiled a little and let her eye meet his for a moment.

'Well, if I command you to remain then, will you do so as my viceroy? I want to return home; Aunt Ottilie grows daily more anxious, more alarmed, but I cannot leave these poor souls all alone with their priests, and their rabbi, who are all as timid as sheep and as stupid. Will you stay in the castle and govern them, and help them till they recover from their fright? It is much to ask, I know, but you have already done so much for Idrac that I am bold to ask you to do more?'

He coloured with a mingled emotion.

'You could ask me nothing that I would not do,' he said in a low tone. 'I could wish you asked me something harder.'

'Oh, it will be very hard,' she said, with an indifference she did not feel. 'It will be very dull, and you will have no one to speak to that knows anything save how to grow flax and cherries. You will have to talk the Magyar tongue all day, and you will have nothing to eat save *kartoffeln* and *salbling*; and I do not know that I am even right,' she added, more gravely, 'to ask you to incur the risks that come from all that soaked ground, which will be damp so long.'

'The risks that you have borne yourself! Pray do not wound me by any such scruple as that. I shall be glad, I shall be proud, to be for ever so short or so long a time as you command, your representative, your servant.'

'You are very good.'

'No.'

His eyes looked at hers with a quick flash, in which all the passion he dared not express was spoken. She averted her glance and continued calmly: 'You are very good indeed to Idrac. It will be a great assistance and comfort to me to know that you are here. The poor people already love you, and you will write to me and tell me all that may need to be done. I will leave you the yacht and Anton. I shall return by land with my woman; and when I reach home I will send you Herr Greswold. He is a good companion, and has a great admiration for you, though he wishes that you had not forsaken the science of botany.'

'It is like all other dissection or vivisection; it spoils the artistic appreciation of the whole. I am yet unsophisticated

enough to feel the charm of a bank of violets, of a cliff covered with alpen-roses. I may write to you?'

'You must write to me! It is you who will know all the needs of Idrac. But are you sure that to remain here will not interfere with your own projects, your own wishes, your own duties?'

'I have none. If I had any I would throw them away, with pleasure, to be of use to one of your dogs, to one of your birds.'

She moved from his side a little.

'Look how the sun has come out. I can see the sparkle of the brass on the cannon down yonder at Neusatz. We had better go now. I must see my sick people and then leave as soon as I can. The yacht must take me to Mohacs; from there I will send her back to you.'

'Do as you will. I can have no greater happiness than to obey you.'

'I am sure that I thank you in the way that you like best, when I say that I believe you.'

She said the words in a very low tone, but so calmly that the calmness of them checked any other words he might have uttered. It was a royal acceptance of a loyal service; nothing more. The boat took them back to the fortress. Whilst she was occupied in her farewell to the sick people, and her instructions to those who attended on them, he, left to himself in the apartment she had made her own, instinctively went to an old harpsichord that stood there and touched the keys. It had a beautiful case, rich with the varnish of the Martins. He played with it awhile for its external beauty, and then let his fingers stray over its limited keyboard. It had still sweetness in it, like the spinet of Hohenszalras. It suited certain pathetic quaint old German airs he knew, and which he half unconsciously reproduced upon it, singing them as he did so in a low tone. The melody, very soft and subdued, suited to the place where death had been so busy and nature so unsparing, and where a resigned exhaustion had now succeeded to the madness of terror, reached the ears of the sick women in the Rittersäal and of Wanda von Szalras seated beside their beds.

'It is like the saints in Heaven sighing in pity for us here,' said one of the women who was very feeble and old, and she smiled as she heard. The notes, tremulous from age but penetrating in their sweetness, came in slow calm movements of harmony through the stillness of the chamber; his voice very low also, but clear, ascended with them. Wanda sat quite still, and listened with a strange pleasure. 'He alone,' she thought, 'can make the dumb strings speak.'

It was almost dusk when she descended to the room which she had made her own. In the passages of the castle oil wicks were

lighted in the iron lamps and wall sconces, but here it was without any light, and in the gloom she saw the dim outline of his form as he sat by the harpsichord. He had ceased playing; his head was bent down and rested on the instrument; he was lost in thought, and his whole attitude was dejected. He did not hear her approach, and she looked at him some moments, herself unseen. A great tenderness came over her: he was unhappy, and he had been very brave, very generous, very loyal: she felt almost ashamed. She went nearer, and he raised himself abruptly.

'I am going,' she said to him. 'Will you come with me to the yacht?'

He rose, and though it was dusk, and in this chamber so dark that his face was indistinct to her, she was sure that tears had been in his eyes.

'Your old harpsichord has the vernis Martin,' he said, with effort. 'You should not leave it buried here. It has a melody in it too, faint and simple and full of the past, like the smell of dead rose-leaves. Yes, I will have the honour to come with you. I wish there were a full moon. It will be a dark night on the Danube.'

'My men know the soundings of the river well. As for the harpsichord, you alone have found its voice. It shall go to your rooms in Paris.'

'You are too good, but I would not take it. Let it go to Hohenszalras.'

'Why would you not take it?'

'I would take nothing from you.'

He spoke abruptly, and with some sternness.

'I think there is such a thing as being too proud?' she said, with hesitation.

'Your ancestors would not say so,' he answered, with an effort; she understood the meaning that underlay the words. He turned away and closed the lid of the harpsichord, where little painted cupids wantoned in a border of metal scroll-work.

All the men and women well enough to stand crowded on the water-stairs to see her departure; little children were held up in their mothers' arms and bidden remember her for evermore; all feeble creatures lifted up their voices to praise her; Jew and Christian blessed her; the water-gate was cumbered with sobbing people, trying to see her face, to kiss her skirt, for the last time. She could not be wholly unmoved before that unaffected, irrepressible emotion. Their poor lives were not worth much, but such as they were she, under Heaven, had saved them.

'I will return and see you again,' she said to them, as she made a slow way through the eager crowd. 'Thank Heaven, my people, not me. And I leave my friend with you, who did much more for you than I. Respect him and obey him.'

They raised with their thin trembling voices a loud *Eljén*! of

homage and promise, and she passed away from their sight into the evening shadows on the wide river.

Sabran accompanied her to the vessel, which was to take her to the town of Mohacs, thence to make her journey home by railway.

'I shall not leave until you bid me, even though you should forget to call me all my life!' he said, as the boat slipped through the dark water.

'Such oblivion would be a poor reward.'

'I have had reward enough. You have called me your friend.'

She was silent. The boat ran through the dusk and the rippling rays of light streaming from the sides of the yacht, and they went on board. He stood a moment with uncovered head before her on the deck, and she gave him her hand.

'You will come to the Holy Isle?' she said, as she did so.

'If you bid me,' he said, as he bowed and kissed her hand. His lips trembled as he did so, and by the lamplight she saw that he was very pale.

'I shall bid you,' she said, very softly, 'by-and-by. Farewell!'

He bowed very low once more, then he dropped over the yacht's side into the boat waiting below; the splash of the oars told her he was gone back to Idrac. The yawl weighed anchor and began to go up the river, a troublesome and tedious passage at all seasons. She sat on deck watching the strong current of the Danube as it rolled on under the bow of the schooner. For more than a league she could see the beacon that burned by the water-gate of the fortress. When the curve of the stream hid it from her eyes she felt a pang of painful separation, of wistful attachment to the old dreary walls where she had seen so much suffering and so much courage, and where she had learned to read her own heart without any possibility of ignoring its secrets. A smile came on her mouth and a moisture in her eyes as she sat alone in the dark autumn night, while the schooner made her slow ascent through the swell that accompanies the influx of the Drave.

CHAPTER XIV.

In two days' time Hohenszalras received its mistress home.

She was not in any way harmed by the perils she had encountered, and the chills and fever to which she had been exposed. On the contrary, her eyes had a light and her face had a bloom which for many months had not been there.

The Princess heard a brief sketch of what had passed in

almost total silence. She had disapproved strongly, and she said that her disapproval could not change, though a merciful heavenly host had spared her the realisation of her worst fears.

The name of Sabran was not spoken. Wanda was of a most truthful temper, but she could not bring herself to speak of his presence at Idrac; the facts would reveal themselves inevitably soon enough.

She sent Greswold to the Danube laden with stores and medicines. She received a letter every morning from her delegate; but he wrote briefly, and with scrupulous care, the statements of facts connected with the town and reports of what had been done. Her engineer had arrived from the mines by Kremnitz, and the builders estimated that the waters would have subsided and settled enough, if no fresh rising took place, for them to begin the reconstruction of the town with the beginning of the new month. Ague and fever were still very common, and fresh cases were brought in every hour to the hospital in the fortress. He wrote on the arrival of Herr Greswold, that, with her permission, he himself would still stay on, for the people had grown used to him, and having some knowledge of hydraulics he would be interested to see the plans proposed by her engineers for preserving the town from similar calamities.

Three weeks passed; all that time she spoke but little either of him or of any other subject. She took endless rides, and she sat many hours doing nothing in the white room, absorbed in thought. The Princess, who had learned what had passed, with admirable exercise of tact and self-restraint made neither suggestion nor innuendo, and accepted the presence of a French Marquis at a little obscure town in Sclavonia as if it were the most natural circumstance in the world.

'All the Szalras have been imperious, arrogant, and of complicated character,' she thought; 'she has the same temper, though it is mitigated in her by great natural nobility of disposition and strong purity of motives. She will do as she chooses, let all the world do what it may to change her. If I say a word either way it may take effect in some wholly unforeseen manner that I should regret. It is better to abstain. In doubt do nothing is the soundest of axioms.'

And Princess Ottilie, who on occasion had the wisdom of the serpent with the sweetness of the dove, preserved a discreet silence, and devoured her really absorbing curiosity in her own heart.

At the end of the fourth week she heard that all was well at Idrac, so far as it could be so in a place almost wholly destroyed. There was no sign of renewed rising of the inland streams. The illness was diminished, almost conquered; the people had begun to take heart and hope, and, being aided, wished to aid themselves. The works for new embankments, water-gates, and streets

were already planned, though they could not be begun until the spring. Meanwhile, strong wooden houses were being erected on dry places, which could shelter *ad interim* many hundreds of families; the farmers were gradually venturing to return to their flooded lands. The town had suffered grievously and in much irreparably, but it began to resume its trade and its normal life.

She hesitated a whole day when she heard this. Though Sabran did not hint at any desire of his own to leave the place, she knew it was impossible to bid him remain longer, and that a moment of irrevocable decision was come. She hesitated all the day, slept little all the night, then sent him a brief telegram: 'Come to the Island.'

Obey the summons as rapidly as he might, he could not travel by Vienna and Salzburg more quickly than in some thirty hours or more. The time passed to her in a curious confusion and anxiety. Outwardly she was calm enough; she visited the schools, wrote some letters, and took her usual long ride in the now leafless woods, but at heart she was unquiet and ill at ease, troubled more than by anything else at the force of the desire she felt to meet him once more. It was but a month since they had parted on the deck, and it seemed ten years. She had known what he had meant when he had said that he would come if she bade him; she had known that she would only do the sheerest cruelty and treachery if she called him thither only to dismiss him. It had not been a visit of the moment, but all his life that she had consented to take when she had written 'Come to the Island.'

She would never have written it unless she had been prepared to fulfil all to which it tacitly pledged her. She was incapable of wantonly playing with any passion that moved another, least of all with his. The very difference of their position would have made indecision or coyness in her seem cruelty, humiliation. The decision hurt her curiously with a sense of abdication, mortification, and almost shame. To a very proud woman in whom the senses have never asserted their empire, there is inevitably an emotion of almost shame, of self-surrender, of loss of self-respect, in the first impulses of love. It made her abashed and humiliated to feel the excitation that the mere touch of his hand, the mere gaze of his eyes, had power to cause her. 'If this be love,' she thought, 'no wonder the world is lost for it.'

Do what she would, the time seemed very long; the two evenings that passed were very tedious and oppressive. The Princess seemed to observe nothing of what she was perfectly conscious of, and her flute-like voice murmured on in an unending stream of commonplaces to which her niece replied much at random.

In the afternoon of the third day she stood on the terrace

looking down the lake and towards the Holy Isle, with an impatience of which she was in turn impatient. She was dressed in white woollen stuff with silver threads in it; she had about her throat an old necklace of the Golden Fleece, of golden shells enamelled, which had been a gift from Charles the Fifth to one of her house; over her shoulders, for the approach of evening was cold, she had thrown a cloak of black Russian sables. She made a figure beautiful, stately, patrician, in keeping with the background of the great donjon tower, and the pinnacled roofs, and the bronze warriors in their Gothic niches.

When she had stood there a few minutes looking down the lake towards the willows of the monastery island, a boat came out from the willow thickets, and came over the mile-and-half of green shadowy water. There was only one person in it. She recognised him whilst he was still far off, and a smile came on her mouth that it was a pity he could not see.

He was a bold man, but his heart stood still with awe of her, and his soul trembled within him at this supreme moment of his fate. For he believed that she would not have bidden him there unless her hand was ready to hold out destiny to him—the destiny of his maddest, of his sweetest, dreams.

She came forward a few paces to meet him; her face was grave and pale, but her eyes had a soft suppressed light.

'I have much for which to thank you,' she said, as she held out her hand to him. Her voice was tremulous though calm.

He kissed her hand, then stood silent. It seemed to him that there was nothing to say. She knew what he would have said if he had been king, or hero, or meet mate for her. His pulses were beating feverishly, his self-possession was gone, his eyes did not dare to meet hers. He felt as if the green woods, the shining waters, the rain-burdened skies were wheeling round him. That dumbness, that weakness, in a man so facile of eloquence, so hardy and even cynical in courage, touched her to a wondering pitifulness.

'After all,' she thought once more, 'if we love one another what is it to any one else? We are both free.'

If the gift she would give would be so great that the world would blame him for accepting it, what would that matter so long as she knew him blameless?

They were both mute: he did not even look at her, and she might have heard the beating of his heart. She looked at him and the colour came back into her face, the smile back upon her mouth.

'My friend,' she said very gently, 'did never you think that I also——'

She paused: it was very hard to her to say what she must say, and he could not help her, dared not help her, to utter it.

They stood thus another moment mute, with the sunset glow

upon the shining water, and upon the feudal majesty of the great castle.

Then she looked at him with a straight, clear, noble glance, and with the rich blood mounting in her face, stretched out her hand to him with a royal gesture.

'They robbed you of your ivy leaf, my cruel Prussian cousins. Will you—take—this—instead?'

Then Heaven itself opened to his eyes. He did not take her hand. He fell at her feet and kissed them.

CHAPTER XV.

'Is it wisest after all to be very unwise, dear mother mine?' she said a little later, with a smile that was tender and happy.

The Princess looked up quickly, and so looking understood.

'Oh, my beloved, is it indeed so? Yes, you are wise to listen to your heart; God speaks in it!'

With tears in her eyes she stretched out her pretty hands in solemn benediction.

'Be His Spirit for ever with you,' she said with great emotion. 'I shall be so content to know that I leave you not alone when our Father calls me, for I think your very greatness and dominion, my dear, but make you the more lonely, as sovereigns are, and it is not well to be alone, Wanda; it is well to have human love close about us.'

'It is to lean on a reed, perhaps,' murmured Wanda, in that persistent misgiving which possessed her. 'And when the reed breaks, then though it has been so weak before, it becomes of iron, barbed and poisoned.'

'What gloomy thoughts! And you have made me so happy, and surely you are happy yourself?'

'Yes. My reed is in full flower, but—but—yes, I am happy; I hope that Bela knows.'

The Princess kissed her once again.

'Ah! he loves you so well.'

'That I am sure of; yet I might never have known it but for you.'

'I did for the best.'

'I will send him to you. I want to be alone a little. Dear mother, he cares for you as tenderly as though he were your son.'

'I have been his friend always,' said the Princess, with a smile, whilst the tears still stood in her eyes. 'You cannot say so much, Wanda; you were very harsh.'

'I know it. I will atone to him.'

The eyes of the Princess followed her tenderly.

'And she will make her atonement generously, grandly,' she thought. 'She is a woman of few protestations, but of fine impulses and of unerring magnanimity. She will be incapable of reminding him that their kingdom is hers. I have done this thing; may Heaven be with it! If she had loved no one, life would have grown so pale, so chill, so monotonous to her; she would have tired of herself, having nothing but herself for contemplation. Solitude has been only grand to her hitherto because she has been young, but as the years rolled on she would have died without ever having lived; now she will live. She may have to bear pains, griefs, infidelities, calamities that she would have escaped; but even so, how much better the summer day, even with the summer storm, than the dull, grey, quiet, windless weather! Of course, if she could have found sanctuary in the Church—— But her faith is not absolute and unwavering enough for that; she has read too many philosophies; she requires, too, open-air and vigorous life; the cloister would have been to her a prison. She is one of those whose religion lies in activity; she will worship God through her children.'

Sabran entered as she mused, and knelt down before her.

'You have been my good angel, always,' he murmured. 'How can I thank you? I think she would never have let her eyes rest on me but for you.'

The Princess smiled.

'My friend, you are one of those on whom the eyes of women willingly rest, perhaps too willingly. But you—you will have no eyes for any other now? You must deserve my faith in you. Is it not so?'

'Ah, Madame,' he answered with deep emotion, 'all words seem so trite and empty; any fool can make phrases, but when I say that my life shall be consecrated to her, I mean it, in the uttermost loyalty, the uttermost gratitude.'

'I believe you,' said the Princess, as she laid her hand lightly on his bent head. 'Perhaps no man can understand entirely all that she surrenders in admitting that she loves you; for a proud woman to confess so much of weakness is very hard; but I think you will comprehend her better than any other would. I think you will not force her to pass the door of disillusion; and remember that though she will leave you free as air—for she is not made of that poor stuff which would enslave what it loves—she would not soon forgive too great abuse of freedom. I mean if you were ever —ever unfaithful——'

'For what do you take me?' he cried, with indignant passion. 'Is there another woman in the world who could sit beside her, and not be dwarfed, paled, killed, as a candle by the sun?'

'You are only her betrothed,' said the Princess, with a little sigh. 'Men see their wives with different eyes; so I have been

told, at least. Familiarity is no courtier, and time is always cruel.'

'Nay, time shall be our dearest friend,' said Sabran, with a tenderness in his voice that spoke more constancy than a thousand oaths. 'She will be beautiful when she is old, as you are; age will neither alarm nor steal from her; her bodily beauty is like her spiritual, it is cast in lines too pure and clear not to defy the years. Oh, mother mine! (let me call you that) fear nothing; I will love her so well that, all unworthy now, I will grow worthy her, and cause her no moment's pain that human love can spare her.'

'Her people shall be your people, and her God your God,' murmured the Princess, with hand still lying lightly on his head, obediently bent.

When late that night he went across the lake the monks were at their midnight orisons; their voices murmured as one man's the Latin words of praise and prayer, and made a sound like that of a great sea rolling slowly on a lonely shore.

He believed naught that they believed. Deity was but a phrase to him; faith and a future life were empty syllables to him. Yet, in the fulness of his joy and the humiliation of his spirit, he felt his heart swell, his pride sink subdued. He knelt down in the hush and twilight of that humble place of prayer, and for the first moment in many years he also praised God.

No one heeded him: he knelt behind them in the gloom unnoticed; he rose refreshed as men in barren lands in drought are soothed by hearing the glad fall of welcome rain. He had no place there, and in another hour would have smiled at his own weakness; but now he remembered nothing except that he, utterly beyond his deserts, was blessed. As the monks rose to their feet and their loud chanting began to vibrate in the air, he went out unheard, as he had entered, and stood on the narrow strip of land that parted the chapel from the lake. The green waters were rolling freshly in under a strong wind, the shadows of coming night were stealing on; in the south-west a pale yellow moonlight stretched broadly in a light serene as dawn, and against it there rosely squarely and darkly with its many turrets the great keep of Hohenszalras.

He looked, but it was not of that great pile and all which it represented and symbolised that he thought now.

It was of the woman he loved as a woman, not as a great possessor of wealth and lands.

'Almost I wish that she were poor as the saints she resembles!' he thought, with a tender passion that for the hour was true. It seemed to him that had he seen her standing in her shift in the snow, like our Lady of Hungary, discrowned and homeless, he would have been glad. He was honest with the honesty of

passion. It was not the mistress of Hohenszalras that he loved, but his own wife.

Such a marriage could not do otherwise than arouse by its announcement the most angry amazement, the most indignant protests from all the mighty houses with which for so many centuries the house of Szalras had allied itself. In a few tranquil sentences she made known her intentions to those of her relations whom she felt bound thus to honour; but she gave them clearly to understand that it was a formula of respect not an act of consultation. When they received her letters they knew that her marriage was already quite as irrevocable as though it had already taken place in the Hof-Kapelle of Vienna.

All her relatives and all her order were opposed to her betrothal; a cold sufferance was the uttermost which any of them extended to Sabran. A foreigner and poor, and with a troubled and uncertain past behind him, he was bitterly unwelcome to the haughty Prussian, Austrian, and Hungarian nobilities to which she belonged; neither his ancient name nor his recent political brilliancy and military service could place him on an equality with them in their eyes. Her trustees, the Grand Duke Lilienhöhe and the Cardinal Vàsàrhely, with her cousin Kaulnitz, hurried in person as swiftly as special trains could bring them to the Iselthal, but they were too late to avert the blow.

'It is not a marriage for her,' said Kaulnitz, angrily.

'Why not? It is a very old family,' said the Princess, with no less irritation.

'But quite decayed, long ruined,' he returned. 'This man was himself born in exile.'

'As they exile everybody twice in every ten years in France!——'

'And there have been stories——'

'Of whom are there not stories? Calumny is the parasite of character; the stronger the character the closer to it clings the strangler.'

'I never heard him accused of any strength, except of the wrist in *l'escrime*!'

'Do you know anything dishonourable of him? If you do you are bound to say it.'

'Dishonourable is a grave word. No, I cannot say that I do; the society he frequents is a guarantee against that; but his life has been indifferent, complicated, uncertain, not a life to be allied with that of such a woman as Wanda. My dear Princess, it has been a life *dans le milieu parisien*; what more would you have me say?'

'Prince Archambaud's has been that. Yet three years since you earnestly pressed his suit on Wanda.'

'Archambaud! He is one of the first alliances in Europe; he is of blood royal, and he has not been more vicious than other men.'

'It would be better he should have been less so, since he lives so near "the fierce light that beats upon the throne:" an electric light which blackens while it illumines! My good Kaulnitz, you wander very far afield. If you know anything serious against M. de Sabran it is your duty to say it.'

'He is a gambler.'

'He has renounced gambling.'

'He is a duellist.'

'Society was of much better constitution when the duel was its habitual phlebotomy.'

'He has been the lover of many women.'

'I am afraid that is nothing singular.'

'He is hardly more than an adventurer.'

'He counts his ancestry in unbroken succession from the days of Dagobert.'

'He has nothing but a *pignon sur rue* in Paris, and a league or two of rocks and sand in Brittany; yet, though so poor, he made money enough by cards and speculation to be for three years the *amant en titre* of Cochonette.'

Madame Ottilie rose with a little frown.

'I think we will say no more, my dear Baron; the matter is, after all, not yours or mine to decide. Wanda will assuredly do as she likes.'

'But you have so much influence with her.'

'I have none; no one has any: and I think you do not understand her in the least. It may cost her very much to avow to him that she loves him, but once having done that, it will cost her nothing at all to avow it to the world. She is much too proud a woman to care for the world.'

'He is *gentilhomme de race*, I grant,' admitted with reluctance the Grand Duke of Lilienhöhe.

'When has a noble of Brittany been otherwise?' asked the Princess Ottilie.

'I know,' said the Prince; 'but you will admit that he occupies a difficult position—an invidious one.'

'And he carries himself well through it. It is a difficult position which is the test of breeding,' said the Princess, triumphantly, 'and I deny entirely that it is what you call an invidious one. It is you who have the idea of the crowd when you lay so much stress on the mere absence of money.'

'It is the idea of the crowd that dominates in this age.'

'The more reason for us to resist it, if it be so.'

'I think you are in love with him yourself, my sister!'

'I should be were I forty years younger.'

The Countess Brancka alone wrote with any sort of sympathy and pleasure to congratulate them both.

'I was sure that Parsifal would win soon or late,' she said. 'Only remember that he is a Parsifal *doublé* by a de Morny.'

Wanda read that line with contracted brows. It angered her more than the outspoken remonstrances of the Vàrhely, of the Lilienhöhe, of the Kaulnitz, of the many great families to whom she was allied. De Morny!—a bastard, an intriguer, a speculator, a debaucher! The comparison had an evil insinuation, and displeased her.

She was not a woman, however, likely either for insinuation or remonstrance to change her decisions or abandon her wishes. She had so much of the '*éternel féminin*' in her that she was only the more resolved in her own course because others, by evil prophecy and exaggerated fears, sought to turn her from it. What they said was natural, she granted, but it was unjust and would be unjustified. All the expostulation, diplomatically hinted or stoutly outspoken, of those who considered that they had the right to make such remonstrances produced not the smallest effect upon the mind of the woman whom, as Baron Kaulnitz angrily expressed it, Sabran had magnetised. Once again Love was a magician, against whom wisdom, prudence, and friendship had no power of persuasion.

The melancholy that she observed in him seemed to her only the more graceful; there was no vulgar triumph in his own victory, such as might have suggested that the material advantages of that triumph were present to him. That he loved her greatly she could not doubt, and that he had striven to conceal it from her she could not doubt either. The sadness which at times overcame him was but natural in a proud man, whose fortunes were unequal to his birth, and who was also sensible of many brilliant gifts, intellectual, that he had wasted, which, had they been fully utilised, would have justified his aspiration to her hand.

'Try and persuade him,' she said to Mdme. Ottilie, 'to think less of this mere accident of difference between us. If it were difference of birth it might be insurmountable or intolerably painful; but a mere difference of riches matters no more than the colour of one's eyes, or the inches of one's stature.'

The Princess shook her head.

'If he did not feel it as he does, he would not be the man that he is. A marriage contract to which the lover brings nothing must always be humiliating to himself. Besides, it seems to him that the world at large must condemn him as a mere fortune-hunter.'

'Since I am convinced of the honesty and purity of his motives, what matters the opinion of others?'

'How can he tell that the world may not some day induce you to doubt those motives?'

Wanda did not reply.

'But he will cease to think of any disparity when all that is mine has been his a year or two,' she thought. 'All the people shall look to him as their lord, since he will be mine; even if I

think differently to him on any matter I will not say it, lest I should remind him that the power lies with me; he shall be no prince consort, he shall be king.'

As the generous resolve passed dreamily through her mind she was listening to the Coronation Mass of Liszt, as he played it on the organ within. It sounded to her like the hymn of the future; a chorus of grave and glorious voices shouting welcome to the serene and joyous years to come.

When she was next alone with him she said to him very tenderly:

'I want you to promise me one thing.'

'I promise you all things. What is this one?'

'It is this: you are troubled at the thought that I have one of those great fortunes which form the *acte d'accusation* of socialists against society, and that you have lost all except the rocks and salt beach of Romaris. Now I want you to promise me never to think of this fact. It is beneath you. Fortune is so precarious a thing, so easily destroyed by war or revolution, that it is not worth contemplation as a serious barrier between human beings. A treachery, a sin, even a lie, any one of those may be a wall of adamant, but a mere fortune!—Promise me that you will never think of mine, except inasmuch, my beloved, as it may enhance my happiness by ministering to yours.'

He had grown very pale as she spoke, and his lips had twice parted to speak without words coming from them. When she had ceased he still remained silent.

'I do not like the world to come between us, even in a memory; it is too much flattery to it,' she continued. 'Surely it is treason against me to be troubled by what a few silly persons will or will not say in a few salons? You have too little vanity, I think, where others have too much!'

He stooped and kissed her hand.

'Could any man live and fail to be humble before you?' he said with passionate tenderness. 'Yes, the world will say, and say rightly, that I have done a base thing, and I cannot forget that the world will be right; yet since you honour me with your divine pity, can I turn away from it? Could a dying man refuse a draught of the water of life?'

A great agitation mastered him for the moment. He hid his face upon her hands as he held them clasped in his.

'We will drink that water together, and as long as we are together it will never be bitter, I think,' she said very softly.

Her voice seemed to sink into his very soul, so much it said of faith, so much it aroused of remorse.

Then the great joy which had entered his life, like a great dazzling flood of light suddenly let loose into a darkened chamber, so blinded, consumed, and intoxicated him, that he forgot all else; all else save this one fact—she would be his, body and soul, night

and day, in life and in death for ever; his children borne by her, his life spent with her, her whole existence surrendered to him.

For some days after that she mused upon the possibility of rendering him entirely independent of herself, without insulting him by a direct offer of a share in her possessions. At last a solution occurred to her. The whole of the fiefs of Idrac constituted a considerable appanage apart; its title went with it. When it had come into the Szalras family by marriage, as far back as the fifteenth century, it had been a principality; it was still a seigneurie, and many curious feudal privileges and distinctions went with it.

It was Idrac now that she determined to abandon to her lover.

'He will be seigneur of Idrac,' she thought, 'and I shall be so glad for him to bear an Austrian name.'

She herself would always retain her own name, and would take no other.

'We will go and revisit it together,' she thought, and though she was all alone at that moment, a soft warmth came into her face, and a throb of emotion to her heart, as she remembered all that would lie in that one word 'together,' all the tender and intimate union of the years to come.

Her trustees were furious, and sought the aid of the men of law to enable them to step in and arrest her in what they deemed a course of self-destruction, but the law could not give them so much power; she was her own mistress, and as sole inheritrix had received her possessions singularly untrammelled by restrictions. In vain Prince Lilienhöhe spent his severe and chilly anger, Kaulnitz his fine sarcasm and delicate insinuations, and the Cardinal his stately and authoritative wrath. She was not to be altered in her decision.

Austrian law allowed her to give away an estate to her husband if she chose, and there was nothing in the private settlements of her property to prevent her availing herself of the law.

Strenuous opposition was encountered by her to this project, by every one of her relatives, hardly excluding the Princess Ottilie; 'for,' said that sagacious recluse, 'your horses may show you, my dear, the dangers of a rein too loose.'

'I want no rein at all,' said Wanda. 'You forget that, to my thinking, marriage should never be bondage; two people with independent wills, tastes, and habits should mutually concede a perfect independence of action to each other. When one must yield, it must be the woman.'

'Those are very fine theories,' the Princess remarked with caution.

'I hope we shall put them in practice,' said Wanda, with unruffled good humour. 'Dear mother, I am sure you can understand that I want him to feel he is wholly independent of me.

To what I love best on earth shall I dole out a niggard largesse from my wealth? If I were capable of doing so he would grow in time to hate me, and his hatred would be justified.'

'I never should have supposed you would become so romantic,' said the Princess.

'It will make him independent of you,' objected Prince Lilienhöhe.

'That is what, beyond all, I desire him to be,' she answered.

'It is an infatuation,' sighed Cardinal Vàsàrhely, out of her hearing, 'when Egon would have brought to her a fortune as large as her own.'

'You think water should always run to the sea,' said Princess Ottilie; 'surely that is great waste sometimes?'

'I think you are as infatuated as she is,' murmured the Cardinal. 'You forget that had she not been inspired with this unhappy sentiment she would have most probably left Hohenszalras to the Church.'

'She would have done nothing of the kind. Your Eminence mistakes,' answered Madame Ottilie, sharply. 'Hohenszalras and everything else, had she died unmarried, would have certainly gone to the Habsburgs.'

'That would have been better than to an adventurer.'

'How can you call a Breton noble an adventurer? It is one of the purest aristocracies of the world, if poor.'

'*Ce que femme veut*,' sighed his Eminence, who knew how often even the Church had been worsted by women.

The Countess von Szalras had her way, and although when the marriage-deeds were drawn up they all set aside completely any possibility of authority or of interference on the part of her husband, and maintained in the clearest and firmest manner her entire liberty of action and enjoyment of inalienable properties and powers, she had the deed of gift of Idrac locked up in her cabinet, and thought to herself, as the long dreary preamble and provisions of the law were read aloud to her, 'So will he be always his own master. What pleasure that your hawk stays by you if you chain him to your wrist? If he loves you he will sail back uncalled from the longest flight. I think mine always will. If not—if not—well, he must go!'

One morning she came to him with a great roll of yellow parchment emblazoned and with huge seals bearing heraldic arms and crowns. She spread it out before him as they stood alone in the Rittersäal. He looked scarcely at it, always at her. She wore a gown of old gold plush that gleamed and glowed as she moved, and she had a knot of yellow tea-roses at her breast, fastened in with a little dagger of sapphires. She had never looked more truly a great lady, more like a châtelaine of the Renaissance, as she spread out the great roll of parchment before him on one of the tables of the knights' hall.

'Look!' she said to him. 'I had the lawyers bring this over for you to see. It is the deed by which Stephen, first Christian King of Hungary, confirmed to the Counts of Idrac in the year 1001 all their feudal rights to that town and district, as a fief. They had been lords there long before. Look at it; here, farther down you see is the reconfirmation of the charter under the Habsburg seal, when Hungary passed to them; but you do not attend, where are your eyes?'

'On you! Carolus Duran must paint you again in that dead gold with those roses.'

'They are only hothouse roses; who cares for them? I love no forced flowers either in nature or humanity. Come, study this old parchment. It must have some interest for you. It is what makes you lord of Idrac.'

'What have I to do with Idrac? It is one of the many jewels of your coronet, to which I can add none!'

But to please her he bent over the crabbed black letter and the antique blazonings of the great roll to which the great dead men had set their sign and seal. She watched him as he read it, then after a little time she put her hand with a caressing movement on his shoulder.

'My love, I can do just as I will with Idrac. The lawyers are agreed on that, and the Kaiser will confirm whatever I do. Now I want to give you Idrac, make you wholly lord of it; indeed, the thing is already done. I have signed all the documents needful, and, as I say, the Emperor will confirm any part of them that needs his assent. My Réné, you are a very proud man, but you will not be too proud to take Idrac and its title from your wife. But for that town who can say that our lives might not have been passed for ever apart? Why do you look so grave? The Kaiser and I both want you to be Austrian. When I transfer to you the fief of Idrac you are its Count for evermore.'

He drew a quick deep breath as if he had been struck a blow, and stood gazing at her. He did not speak, his eyes darkened as with pain. For the moment she was afraid that she had wounded him. With exquisite softness of tone and touch she took his hand and said to him tenderly:

'Why will you be so proud? After all, what are these things? Since we love one another, what is mine is yours; a formula more or less is no offence. It is my fancy that you should have the title and the fief. The people know you there, and your heroic courage will be for ever amongst their best traditions. Dear! once I read that it needs a greater soul to take generously than to give. Be great so, now, for my sake!'

'Great!' he echoed the word hoarsely, and a smile of bitter irony passed for a moment over his features. But he controlled the passionate self-contempt that rose in him. He knew that whatever else he was, he was her lover, and her hero in her sight,

If the magnitude and magnanimity of her gifts overwhelmed and oppressed him, he was recalled to self-control by the sense of her absolute faith in him. He pressed her hands against his heavily-beating heart.

'All the greatness is with you, my beloved,' he said with effort. 'Since you delight to honour me, I can but strive my utmost to deserve your honour. It is like your beautiful and lavish nature to be prodigal of gifts. But when you give yourself, what need is there for aught else?'

'But Idrac is my caprice. You must gratify it.'

'I will take the title gladly at your hands, then. The revenues—No.'

'You must take it all, the town and the title, and all they bring,' she insisted. 'In truth, but for you there would possibly be no town at all. Nay, my dear, you must do me this little pleasure: it will become you so well that Countship of Idrac: it is as old a place as Vindobona itself.'

'Do you not understand?' she added, with a flush on her face. 'I want you to feel that it is wholly yours: that if I die, or if you leave me, it remains yours still. Oh, I do not doubt you; not for one moment. But liberty is always good. And Idrac will make you an Austrian noble in your own right. If you persist in refusing it I will assign it to the Crown; you will pain me and mortify me.'

'That is enough! Never wittingly in my life will I hurt you. But if you wish me to be lord of Idrac, invest me with the title, my Empress. I will take it and be proud of it; and as for the revenues—well, we will not quarrel for them. They shall go to make new dykes and new bastions for the town, or pile themselves one on another in waiting for your children.'

She smiled and her face grew warm as she turned aside and took up one of the great swords with jewelled hilts and damascened scabbards, which were ranged along the wall of the Rittersäal with other stands of arms.

She drew the sword, and as he fell on his knee before her smote him lightly on the shoulder with its blade.

'Rise, Graf von Idrac!' she said, stooping and touching his forehead with the bouquet that she wore at her breast. He loosened one of the roses and held it to his lips.

'I swear my fealty now and for ever,' he said with emotion, and his face was paler and his tone was graver than the playfulness of the moment seemed to call for in him.

'Would to Heaven I had had no other name than this one you give me,' he murmured as he rose. 'Oh, my love, my lady, my guardian angel! Forget that I ever lived before, forget all my life when I was unworthy you; let me live only from the day that will you make me your vassal and your——'

'That will make you my lord!' she said softly; then she stooped, and for the first time kissed him.

What caused her the only pain that disturbed the tranquillity of these cloudless days was the refusal of her cousin Egon to be present at her marriage. He sent her, with some great jewels that had come from Persia, a few words of sad and wistful affection.

'My presence,' he added in conclusion, 'is no more needed for your happiness than are these poor diamonds and pearls needed in your crowded jewel-cases. You will spare me a trial, which it could be of no benefit to you for me to suffer. I pray that the Marquis de Sabran may all his life be worthy of the immense trust and honour which you have seen fit to give to him. For myself, I have been very little always in your life. Henceforth I shall be nothing. But if ever you call on me for any service—which it is most unlikely you ever will do—I entreat you to remember that there is no one living who will more gladly or more humbly do your bidding at all cost than I, your cousin Egon.'

The short letter brought tears to her eyes. She said nothing of it to Sabran. He had understood from Mdme. Ottilie that Prince Vàsàrhely had loved his cousin hopelessly for many years, and could not be expected to be present at her marriage.

In a week from that time their nuptials were celebrated in the Court Chapel of the Hofburg at Vienna, with all the pomp and splendour that a brilliant and ceremonious Court could lend to the espousal of one of the greatest ladies of the old Duchy of Austria.

Immediately after the ceremony they left the capital for Hohenszalras.

At the signing of the contract on the previous night, when he had taken up the pen he had grown very pale; he had hesitated a moment, and glanced around him on the magnificent crowd, headed by the Emperor and Empress, with a gleam of fear and anxiety in his eyes, which Baron Kaulnitz, who was intently watching him, had alone perceived.

'There is something. What is it?' had mused the astute German.

It was too late to seek to know. Sabran had bent down over the parchment, and with a firm hand had signed his name and title.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was midsummer once more in the Iselthal, five years and a half after the celebration at the Imperial palace of those nuptials which had been so splendid that their magnificence had been noticeable even at that magnificent Court. The time had seemed to her like one long, happy, cloudless day, and if to him there had

come any fatigue, any satiety, any unrest, such as almost always come to the man in the fruition of his passion, he suffered her to see none of them.

It was one of those rare marriages in which no gall of a chain is felt, but a quick and perfect sympathy ensures that harmony which passion alone is insufficient to sustain. He devoted himself with ardour to the care of the immense properties that belonged to his wife; he brought to their administration a judgment and a precision that none had looked for in a man of pleasure; he entered cordially into all her schemes for the well-being of her people dependent on her, and carried them out with skill and firmness. The revenues of Idrac he never touched; he left them to accumulate for his younger son, or expended them on the township itself, where he was adored.

If he were still the same man who had been the lover of Cochonette, the terror of Monte Carlo, the hero of night-long baccara and frontier duels, he had at least so banished the old Adam that it appeared wholly dead. Nor was the death of it feigned. He had flung away the slough of his old life with a firm hand, and the peace, the dignity of his present existence were very precious to him. He was glad to steep himself in them, as a tired and fevered wayfarer was glad to bathe his dusty and heated limbs in the cool, clear waters of the Szalrassee. And he loved his wife with a great love, in which reverence, and gratitude, and passion were all blent. Possession had not dulled, nor familiarity blunted it. She was still to him a sovereign, a saint, a half divine creature, who had stooped to become mortal for his sake, and his children's.

The roses were all aglow on the long lawns and under the grey walls and terraces; the sunbeams were dancing on the emerald surface of the Szalrassee.

'What a long spell of fair weather!' said Sabran, as they sat beneath the great yews beside the keep.

'It is like our life,' said his wife, who was doing nothing but watching the clouds circle round the domes and peaks, which, white as ivory, dazzling and clear, towered upward in the blue air like a mighty amphitheatre.

She had borne him three children in these happy years, the eldest of whom, Bela, played amidst the daisies at her feet, a beautiful fair boy with his father's features and his father's luminous blue eyes. The other two, Gela and the little Ottilie, who had seen but a few months of life, were asleep within doors in their carved ivory cots. They were all handsome, vigorous, and of perfect promise.

'Have I deserved to be so happy?' she would often think, she whom the world called so proud.

'Bela grows so like you!' she said now to his father, who stood near her wicker chair.

'Does he?' said Sabran, with a quick glance that had some pain in it, at the little face of his son. 'Then if the other one be more like you it will be he who will be dearest to me.'

As he spoke he bowed his head down and kissed her hand.

She smiled gravely and sweetly in his eyes.

'That will be our only difference, I think! It is time, perhaps, that we began to have one. Do you think there are two other people in all the world who have passed five years and more together without once disagreeing?'

'In all the world there is not another Countess Wanda!'

'Ah! that is your only defect; you will always avoid argument by escaping through the side-door of compliment. It is true, to be sure, that your flattery is a very high and subtle art.'

'It is like all high art then, based on what is eternally true.'

'You will always have the last word, and it is always so graceful a one that it is impossible to quarrel with it. But, Réné, I want you to speak without compliment to me for once. Tell me, are you indeed never—never—a little weary of being here?'

He hesitated a moment and a slight flush came on his face.

She observed both signs, slight as they were, and sighed; it was the first sigh she had ever breathed since her marriage.

'Of course you are, of course you must be,' she said quickly. 'It has been selfish and blameable of me never to think of it before. It is paradise to me; but no doubt to you, used as you have been to the stir of the world, there must be some tedium, some dulness in this mountain isolation. I ought to have remembered that before.'

'You need do nothing of the kind now,' he said. 'Who has been talking to you? Who has brought this little snake into our Eden?'

'No one; and it is not a snake at all, but a natural reflection. Hohenszalras and you are the world to me, but I cannot expect that Hohenszalras and I can be quite as much to yourself. It is always the difference between the woman and the man. You have great talents; you are ambitious.'

'Were I as ambitious as Alexander, surely I have gained wherewithal to be content!'

'That is only compliment again, or if truth it is only a side of the truth. Nay, love, I do not think for a moment you are tired of me; I am too self-satisfied for that! But I think it is possible that this solitude may have grown, or may grow, wearisome to you; that you desire, perhaps without knowing it, to be more amidst the strife, the movement, and the pleasures of men. Aunt Ottilie calls this "confinement to a fortress;" now that is a mere pleasantry, but if ever you should feel tempted to feel what she feels, have confidence enough in my good sense and in my affection to say so to me, and then——'

'And then? We will suppose I have this ingratitude and bad taste, what then?'

'Why then, my own wishes should not stand for one instant in the way of yours, or rather I would make yours mine. And do not use the word "ingratitude," my dearest; there can be no question of that betwixt you and me.'

'Yes,' said Sabran, as he stooped towards her and touched her hair with his lips. 'When you gave me yourself you made me your debtor for all time; would have made me so had you been as poor as you are rich. When I speak of gratitude it is of *that* gift, I think, not of Hohenszalras.'

A warmth of pleasure flushed her cheek for a moment, and she smiled happily.

'You shall not beg the question so,' she said, with gentle insistence after a moment's pause. 'I have not forgotten your eloquence in the French Chamber. You are that rare thing a born orator. You are not perhaps fitted to be a statesman, for I doubt if you would have the application to bear the tedium necessary, but you have every qualification for a diplomatist, a foreign minister.'

'I have not the first qualification, I have no country!'

She looked at him in surprise—he spoke with bitterness and self-contempt; but in a moment he had added quickly:

'France is nothing to me now, and though I am Austrian by all ties and affections, I am not an Austrian before the law.'

'That is hardly true,' she answered, satisfied with the explanation. 'Since France is little to you you could be naturalised here whenever you chose, even if Idrac have not made you a Croat noble, as I believe the lawyers would say it had; and the Emperor, who knows and admires you, would, I think, at once give you gladly any mission you preferred; you would make so graceful, so perfect, so envied an ambassador! Diplomacy has indeed little force now, yet tact still tells wherever it be found, and it is as rare as blue roses in the unweeded garden of the world. I do not speak for myself, dear; that you know. Hohenszalras is my beloved home, and it was enough for me before I knew you, and nowhere else could life ever seem to me so true, so high, so simple, and so near to God as here. But I do remember that men weary even of happiness when it is unwitnessed, and require the press and stir of emulation and excitation; and, if you feel that want, say so. Have confidence enough in me to believe that your welfare will be ever my highest law. Promise me this.'

He changed colour slightly at her generous and trustful words, but he answered without a moment's pause:

'Whenever I am so thankless to fate I will confess it. No; the world and I never valued one another much. I am far better here in the heart of your mountains. Here only have I known peace and rest.'

He spoke with a certain effort and emotion, and he stooped over his little son and raised him on her knees.

'These children shall grow up at Hohenszalras,' he continued, 'and you shall teach them your love of the open air, the mountain solitudes, the simple people, the forest creatures, the influences and the ways of nature. You care for all those things, and they make up true wisdom, true contentment. As for myself, if you always love me I shall ask no more of fate.'

'If! Can you be afraid?'

'Sometimes. One always fears to lose what one has never merited.'

'Ah, my love, do not be so humble! If you saw yourself as I see you, you would be very proud.'

She smiled as she spoke, and stretched her hand out to him over the golden head of her child.

He took it and held it against his heart, clasped in both his own. Bela, impatient, slipped off his mother's lap to pursue his capture of the daisies; the butterflies were forbidden joys, and he was obedient, though in his own little way he was proud and imperious. But there was a blue butterfly just in front of him, a Lycœna Adonis, like a little bit of the sky come down and dancing about; he could not resist, he darted at it. As he was about to seize it she caught his fingers.

'I have told you, Bela, you are never to touch anything that flies or moves. You are cruel.'

He tried to get away, and his face grew very warm and passionate.

'Bela will be cruel, if he like, he said, knitting his pretty brows.

Though he was not more than four years old he knew very well that he was the Count Bela, to whom all the people gave homage, crowding to kiss his tiny hand after Mass on holy-days. He was a very beautiful child, and all the prettier for his air of pride and resolution; he had been early put on a little mountain pony, and could ride fearlessly down the forest glades with Otto. All the imperiousness of the great race which had dealt out life and death so many centuries at their caprice through the Hohe Tauern seemed to have been inherited by him, coupled with a waywardness and a vanity that were not traits of the house of Szalras. It was impossible, even though those immediately about him were wise and prudent, to wholly prevent the effects of the adulation with which the whole household was eager to wait on every whim of the little heir.

'Bela wishes it!' he would say, with an impatient frown, whenever his desire was combated or crossed: he had already the full conviction that to be Bela was to have full right to rule the world, including in it his brother Gela, who was of a serious, mild, and yielding disposition, and gave up to him in all things. As

compensating qualities he was very affectionate and sensitive, and easily moved to self-reproach.

With a step Sabran reached him.

'You dare to disobey your mother?' he said, sternly. 'Ask her forgiveness at once. Do you hear?'

Bela, who had never heard his father speak in such a tone, was very frightened, and lost all his colour; but he was resolute, and had been four years old on Ascension Day. He remained silent and obstinate.

Sabran put his hand heavily on the child's shoulder.

'Do you hear me, sir? Ask her pardon this moment.'

Bela was now fairly stunned into obedience.

'Bela is sorry,' he murmured. 'Bela begs pardon.'

Then he burst into tears.

'You alarmed him rather too much. He is so very young,' she said to his father, when the child, forgiven and consoled, had trotted off to his nurse, who came for him.

'He shall obey you, and find his law in your voice, or I will alarm him more,' he said with some harshness. 'If I thought he would ever give you a moment's sorrow I should hate him!'

It was not the first time that Sabran had seen his own more evil qualities look at him from the beautiful little face of his elder son, and at each of those times a sort of remorse came upon him. 'I was unworthy to beget *her* children,' he thought, with the self-reproach that seldom left him, even amidst the deep tranquillity of his satisfied passions, and his perfect peace of life. Who could tell what trials, what pains, what shame even, might not fall on her in the years to come, with the errors that her offspring would have in them from his blood?

'It is foolish,' she murmured, 'he is but a baby; yet it hurts one to see the human sin, the human wrath, look out from the infant eyes. It hurts one to remember, to realise, that one's own angel, one's own little flower, has the human curse born with it. I express myself ill; do you know what I mean? No, you do not, dear; you are a man. He is your son, and because he will be handsome and brave you will be proud of him; but he is not a young angel, not a blossom from Eden to you.'

'You are my religion,' he answered, 'you shall be his. When he grows older he shall learn that to be born of such a mother as you is to enter the kingdom of heaven by inheritance. Shall he be unworthy that inheritance because he bears in him also the taint of my sorry passions, of my degraded humanity?'

'Dear! I too am only an erring creature. I am not perfect as you think me.'

'As I know you and all my children shall know you to be.'

'You love me too well,' she said again; 'but it is a *beau défaut*, and I would not have you lose it.'

'I shall never lose it whilst I have life,' he said, with truth and passion. 'I prize it more because most unworthy it.'

She looked at him surprised, and vaguely troubled at the self-reproach and the self-scorn of his passionate utterance. Seeing that surprise and trouble in her glance, he controlled the emotion that for the moment mastered him.

'Ah, love!' he said quickly and truly, 'if you could but guess how gross and base a man's life seems to him contrasted with the life of a pure and noble woman! Being born of you, those children, I think, should be as faultless and as soilless as those pearls that lie on your breast. But then they are mine also; so already on that boy's face one sees the sins of revolt, of self-will, of cruelty—being mine also, your living pearls are dulled and stained!'

A greater remorse than she dreamed of made his heart ache as he said these words; but she heard in them only the utterance of that extreme and unwavering devotion to her which he had shown in all his acts and thoughts from the first hours of their union.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE Princess Ottilie was scarcely less happy than they in the realisation of her dreams and prophecies. Those who had been most bitterly opposed to her alliance with him could find no fault in his actions and his affections.

'I always said that Wanda ought to marry, since she had plainly no vocation for the cloister,' she said a hundred times a year. 'And I was certain that M. de Sabran was the person above all others to attract and to content her. She has much more imagination than she would be willing to allow, and he is capable at once of fascinating her fancy and of satisfying her intellect. No one can be dull where he is; he is one of those who make *la pluie et le beau temps* by his absence or presence; and besides that, no commonplace affection would have ever been enough for her. And he loves her like a poet, which he is at once whenever he leaves the world for Beethoven and Bach. I cannot imagine why you should have opposed the marriage, merely because he had not two millions in the Bank of France.'

'Not for that,' answered the Grand Duke; 'rather because he broke the bank of Monte Carlo, and other similar reasons. A great player of baccara is scarcely the person to endow with the wealth of the Szalras.'

'The wealth is tied up tightly enough at the least, and you will admit that he was yet more eager than you that it should be so.'

'Oh, yes! he behaved very well. I never denied it. But she has placed it in his power to make away with the whole of Idrac, if he should ever choose. That was very unwise, but we had no power to oppose.'

'You may be quite sure that Idrac will go intact to the second son, as it has always done; and I believe but for his own exertions Idrac would now be beneath the Danube waters. Perhaps you never heard all that story of the flood?'

'I only hope that if I have detractors you will defend me from them,' said Prince Lilienhöhe, giving up argument.

Fair weather is always especially fair in the eyes of those who have foretold at sunset that the morrow would be fine; and so the married life of Wanda von Szalras was especially delightful as an object of contemplation, as a theme of exultation, to the Princess, who alone had been clear-sighted enough to foresee the future. She really also loved Sabran like a son, and took pride and pleasure in the filial tenderness he showed her, and in his children, with the beautiful blue eyes that had gleams of light in them like sapphires. The children themselves adored her; and even the bold and wilful Bela was as quiet as a startled fawn beside this lovely little lady, with her snow-white hair and her delicate smile, whose cascades of lace always concealed such wonderful bon-bon boxes, and gilded cosaques, and illuminated stories of the saints.

Almost all their time was spent at Hohenszalras. A few winter months in Vienna was all they had ever passed away from it, except one visit to Idrac and the Hungarian estates. The children never left it for a day. He shared her affection for the place, and for the hardy and frank mountain people around them. He seemed to her to entirely forget Romaris, and beyond the transmission of moneys to its priest, he took no heed of it. She hesitated to recall it to him, since to do so might have seemed to remind him that it was she, not he, who was suzerain in the Hohe Tauern. Romaris was but a bleak rock, a strip of sea-swept sand; it was natural that it should have no great hold on his affections, only recalling as it did all that its lords had lost.

'I hate its name,' he said impetuously once; and seeing the surprise upon her face, he added: 'I was very lonely and wretched there; I tried to take interest in it because you bade me, but I failed; all I saw, all I thought of, was yourself, and I believed you as far and for ever removed from me as though you had dwelt in some other planet. No! perhaps I am superstitious; I do not wish you to go to Romaris. I believe it would bring us misfortune. The sea is full of treachery, the sands are full of graves.'

She smiled.

'Superstition is a sort of parody of faith; I am sure you are not superstitious. I do not care to go to Romaris; I like to cheat

myself into the belief that you were born and bred in the Iselthal. Otto said to me the other day, "My lord must be a son of the soil, or how could he know our mountains so well as he does, and how could he anywhere have learned to shoot like that?'

'I am very glad that Otto does me so much honour. When he first met me, he would have shot me like a fox, if you had given the word. Ah, my love! how often I think of you that day, in your white serge, with your girdle of gold, and your long gold-headed staff, and your little ivory horn. You were truly a châtelaine of the old mystical German days. You had some *Schlüsselblumen* in your hand. They were indeed the key flower to my soul, though, alas! treasures, I fear, you found none on your entrance there.'

'I shall not answer you, since to answer would be to flatter you, and Aunt Ottilie already does that more than is good for you,' she said smiling, as she passed her fingers over the waves of his hair. 'By the way, whom shall we invite to meet the Lilienhöhe? Will you make out a list?'

'The Grand Duke does not share Frau Ottilie's goodness for me.'

'What would you? He has been made of buckram and parchment; besides which, nothing that is not German has, to his mind, any right to exist. By the way, Egon wrote to me this morning; he will be here at last.'

He looked up quickly in unspoken alarm. 'Your cousin Egon? Here?'

'Why are you so surprised? I was sure that sooner or later he would conquer that feeling of being unable to meet you. I begged him to come now; it is eight whole years since I have seen him. When once you have met you will be friends—for my sake.'

He was silent; a look of trouble and alarm was still upon his face.

'Why should you suppose it any easier to him now than then?' he said at length. 'Men who love *you* do not change. There are women who compel constancy, *sans le vouloir*. The meeting can but be painful to Prince Vàsàrhely.'

'Dear Réné,' she answered in some surprise, 'my nearest male relative and I cannot go on for ever without seeing each other. Even these years have done Egon a great deal of harm. He has been absent from the Court for fear of meeting us. He has lived with his hussars, or voluntarily confined to his estates, until he grows morose and solitary. I am deeply attached to him. I do not wish to have the remorse upon me of having caused the ruin of his gallant and brilliant life. When he has been once here he will like you: men who are brave have always a certain sympathy. When he has seen you here he will realise that destiny is unchangeable, and grow reconciled to the knowledge that I am your wife.'

Sabran gave an impatient gesture of denial, and began to write the list of invitations for the autumn circle of guests who were to meet the Prince and Princess of Lilienhöhe.

Once every summer and every autumn Hohenszalras was filled with a brilliant house-party, for she sacrificed her own personal preferences to what she believed to be for the good of her husband. She knew that men cannot always live alone; that contact with the world is needful to their minds and bracing for them. She had a great dread lest the ghost *ennui* should show his pale face over her husband's shoulder, for she realised that from the life of the asphalte of the Champs-Elysées to the life amidst the pine forests of the Iselthal was an abrupt transition that might easily bring tedium in its train. And tædium is the most terrible and the most powerful foe love ever encounters.

Sabran completed the list, and when he had corrected it into due accordance with all Lilienhöhe's personal and political sympathies and antipathies, despatched the invitations, 'for eight days,' written on cards that bore the joint arms of the Counts of Idrac and the Counts of Szalras. He had adopted the armorial bearings of the countship of Idrac as his own, and seemed disposed to abandon altogether those of the Sabrans of Romaris.

When they were written he went out by himself and rode long and fast through the mists of a chilly afternoon, through dripping forest ways and over roads where little water-courses spread in shining shallows. The coming of Egon Vàsàrhely troubled him and alarmed him. He had always dreaded his first meeting with the Magyar noble; and as the years had dropped by one after another, and her cousin had failed to find courage to see her again, he had begun to believe that they and Vàsàrhely would remain always strangers. His wish had begotten his thought. He knew that she wrote at intervals to her cousin, and he to her: he knew that at the birth of each of their children some magnificent gift, with a formal letter of felicitation, had come from the Colonel of the White Hussars; but as time had gone on and Prince Egon had avoided all possibility of meeting them, he had grown to suppose that the wound given her rejected lover was too profound ever to close; nor did he wonder that it was so: it seemed to him that any man who loved her must do so for all eternity, if eternity there should be. To learn suddenly that within another month Vàsàrhely would be his guest, distressed and alarmed him in a manner she never dreamed. They had been so happy. On their cloudless heaven there seemed to him to rise a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but bearing with it disaster and a moonless night.

'Perhaps he will have forgotten,' he thought, as he strove to shake off his forebodings. 'We were so young then. He was not even as old as I!'

And he rode fast and furiously homewards as the day drew in, and the lighted windows of the great castle seemed to smile at him as he saw it high up above the darkness of the woods and of the evening mists, his home, beloved, sacred, infinitely dear to him; dear as the soil of the mother country which the wrecked mariner reaches after facing death on the deep sea.

'God save her from suffering by me!' he said, in an unconscious prayer, as he drew rein before the terrace of Hohenszalras. Almost he believed in God through her.

When, after dressing, he went into the Saxe room, the peace and beauty of the scene had never struck him so strongly as it did now, coming out of the shadows of the wet woods and the gloom of his own anxieties; anxieties the heavier and the more wearing because they could be shared by no one. The soft, full light of the wax candles fell on the Louis Seize embroideries and the white woodwork of the panelling and the china borders of the mirrors. The Princess Ottilie sat making silk-netting for the children's balls; his wife was reading, and Bela and Gela, who were there for their privileged half-hour before dinner, were sitting together on a white bearskin, playing with the coloured balls of the game of solitaire. The soft light from the chandeliers and sconces of the Saxe Royale china fell on the golden heads and the velvet frocks of the children, on the old laces and the tawny-coloured plush of their mother's skirts, on the great masses of flowers in the Saxe bowls, and on the sleeping forms of the big dogs Donau and Neva. It was an interior that would have charmed Chardin, that would have been worthy of Vandyck.

As he looked at it he thought with a sort of ecstacy, 'All that is mine;' and then his heart-strings tightened as he thought again, 'If she knew——?'

She looked up at his entrance with a welcome on her face that needed no words.

'Where have you been in the rain all this long afternoon? You see we have a fire, even though it is midsummer. Bela, rise, and make your obeisance, and push that chair nearer the hearth.'

The two little boys stood up and kissed his hand, one after another, with the pretty formality of greeting on which she always insisted; then they went back to their coloured glass balls, and he sank into a low chair beside his wife with a sigh half of fatigue, half of content.

'Yes, I have been riding all the time,' he said to her. 'I am not sure that Siegfried approved it. But it does one good sometimes, and after the blackness and the wetness of that forest how charming it is to come home!'

She looked at him with wistfulness.

'I wish you were not vexed that Egon is coming! I am sure you have been thinking of it as you rode.'

'Yes, I have; but I am ashamed of doing so. He is your cousin, that shall be enough for me. I will do my best to make him welcome. Only there is this difficulty; a welcome from me to him will seem in itself an insult.'

'An insult! when you are my husband? One would think you were my *jägermeister*. Dear mother mine, help me to scold him.'

'I am a stranger,' he said, under his breath.

She smiled a little, but she said with a certain hauteur:

'You are master of Hohenszalras, as your son will be when our places shall know us no more. Do not let the phantom of Egon come between us, I beseech you. His real presence never will do so, that is certain.'

'Nothing shall come between us,' said Sabran, as his hand took and closed upon hers. 'Forgive me if I have brought some gloomy *nix* out of the dark woods with me; he will flee away in the light of this beloved white-room. No evil spirits could dare stay by your hearth.'

'There are *nixes* in the forests,' said Bela in a whisper to his brother.

'Ja!' said Gela, not comprehending.

'We will kill them all when we are big,' said Bela.

'Ja! ja!' said Gela.

Bela knew very well what a *nix* was. Otto had told him all about kobolds and sprites, as his pony trotted down the drives.

'Or we will take them prisoners,' he added, remembering that his mother never allowed anything to be killed, not even butterflies.

'Ja!' said Gela again, rolling the pretty blue and pink and amber balls about in the white fur of the bearskin.

Gela's views of life were simplified by the disciple's law of imitation; they were restricted to doing whatever Bela did, when it was possible; when it was not possible he remained still adoring Bela, with his little serious face as calm as a god's.

She used to think that when they should grow up Bela would be a great soldier like Wallenstein or Condé, and Gela would stay at home and take care of his people here in the green, lone, happy Iselthal.

Time ran on and the later summer made the blooming hay grow brown on all the alpine meadows, and made the garden of Hohenszalras blossom with a million autumnal glories; it brought also the season of the first house-party. Egon Vàsàrhely was to arrive one day before the Lilienhöhe and the other guests.

'I want Egon so much to see Bela!' she said, with the thoughtless cruelty of a happy mother forgetful of the pain of a rejected lover.

'I fear Bela will find little favour in your cousin's eyes, since he is mine too,' said Sabran.

'Oh, Egon is content to be only our cousin by this——'

'You think so? You do not know yourself if you imagine that.'

'Egon is very loyal. He would not come here if he could not greet you honestly.'

Sabran's face flushed a little, and he turned away. He vaguely dreaded the advent of Egon Vàsàrhely, and there were so many innocent words uttered in the carelessness of intimate intercourse which stabbed him to the quick; she had so wounded him all unconscious of her act.

'Shall we have a game of billiards?' he asked her as they stood in the Rittersäal, whilst the rain fell fast without. She played billiards well, and could hold her own against him, though his game was one that had often been watched by a crowded *galerie* in Paris with eager speculation and heavy wager. An hour afterwards they were still playing when the clang of a great bell announced the approach of the carriage which had been sent to Windisch-Matrey.

'Come!' she said joyously, as she put back her cue in its rest; but Sabran drew back.

'Receive your cousin first alone,' he said. 'He must resent my presence here. I will not force it on him on the threshold of your house.'

'Of our house! Why will you use wrong pronouns? Believe me, dear, Egon is too generous to bear you the animosity you think.'

'Then he never loved you,' said Sabran, somewhat impatiently, as he sent one ball against another with a sharp collision. 'I will come if you wish it,' he added; 'but I think it is not in the best taste to so assert myself.'

'Egon is only my cousin and your guest. You are the master of Hohenszalras. Come! you were not so diffident when you received the Emperor.'

'I had done the Emperor no wrong,' said Sabran, controlling the impatience and the reluctance he still felt.

'You have done Egon none. I should not have been his wife had I never been yours.'

'Who knows?' murmured Sabran, as he followed her into the entrance hall. The stately figure of Egon Vàsàrhely enveloped in furs was just passing through the arched doorway.

She went towards him with a glad welcome and both hands outstretched.

Prince Egon bowed to the ground: then took both her hands in his and kissed her on the cheek.

Sabran, who grew very pale, advanced and greeted him with ceremonious grace.

'My wife has bade me welcome you, Prince, but it would be presumptuous in me, a stranger, to do that. All her kindred must be dear and sacred here.'

Egon Vàsàrhely, with an effort to which he had for years been vainly schooling himself, stretched out his hand to take her husband's; but as he did so, and his glance for the first time dwelt on Sabran, a look surprised and indefinitely perplexed came on his own features. Unconsciously he hesitated a moment; then, controlling himself, he replied with a few fitting words of courtesy and friendship. That there should be some embarrassment, some constraint, was almost inevitable, and did not surprise her: she saw both, but she also saw that both were hidden under the serenity of high breeding and worldly habit. The most difficult moment had passed: they went together into the Rittersäal, talked together a little on a few indifferent topics, and in a little space Prince Egon withdrew to his own apartments to change his travelling clothes. Sabran left him on the threshold of his chamber.

Vàsàrhely locked the doors, locking out even his servant, threw off his furs and sat down, leaning his head on his hands. The meeting had cost him even more than he had feared that it would do. For five years he had dreaded this moment, and its pain was as sharp and as fresh to him as though it had been unforeseen. To sleep under the same roof with the husband of Wanda von Szalras! He had overrated his power of self-control, underrated his power of suffering, when to please her he had consented after five years to visit Hohenszalras. What were five years?—half a century would not have changed him.

Under the plea of fatigue, he, who had sat in his saddle eighteen hours at a stretch, and was braced to every form of endurance in the forest chase and in the tented field, sent excuses to his host for remaining in his own rooms until the Ave Maria rung. When he at length went down to the blue-room where she was, he had recovered, outwardly at least, his tranquillity and his self-possession, though here, in his familiar, once beloved chamber, where every object had been dear to him from his boyhood, a keener trial than any he had passed through awaited him, as she led forward to meet him a little boy clad in white velvet, with a cloud of light golden hair above deep blue luminous eyes, and said to him:

'Egon, this is my Bela. You will love him a little, for my sake?'

Vàsàrhely felt a chill run through him like the cold of death as he stooped towards the child; but he smiled and touched the boy's forehead with his lips.

'May the spirit of our lost Bela be with him and dwell in his heart,' he murmurred; 'better I cannot wish him.'

With an effort he turned to Sabran.

'Your little son is a noble child; you may with reason be proud of him. He is very like you in feature. I see no trace of the Szalras.'

'The other boy is more like Wanda,' replied Sabran, sensible of a certain tenacity of observation with which Vàsàrhely was gazing at him. 'As for my daughter, she is too young for any one to say whom she will resemble. All I desire is that she should be like her mother, physically and spiritually.'

'Of course,' said the Prince, absently, still looking from Sabran to the child, as if in the endeavour to follow some remembrance that eluded him. The little face of Bela was a miniature of his father's, they were as alike as it is possible for a child and a man to be, and Egon Vàsàrhely perplexedly mused and wondered at vague memories which rose up to him as he gazed on each.

'And what do you like best to do, my little one?' he asked of Bela, who was regarding him with curious and hostile eyes.

'To ride,' answered Bela at once, in his pretty uncertain German.

'There you are a true Szalras at least. And your brother Gela, can he ride yet? Where is Gela, by the way?'

'He is asleep,' said Bela, with some contempt. 'He is a little thing. Yes; he rides, but it is in a chair-saddle. It is not real riding.'

'I see. Well, when you come and see me you shall have some real riding, on wild horses if you like;' and he told the child stories of the great Magyar steppes, and the herds of young horses, and the infinite delight of the unending gallop over the wide hushed plain; and all the while his heart ached bitterly, and the sight of the child—who was her child, yet had that stranger's face—was to him like a jagged steel being turned and twisted inside a bleeding wound. Bela, however, was captivated by the new visions that rose before him.

'Bela will come to Hungary,' he said with condescension, and then with an added thought, continued: 'I think Bela has great lands there. Otto said so.'

'Bela has nothing at all,' said Sabran, sternly. 'Bela talks great nonsense sometimes, and it would be better he should go to sleep with his brother.'

Bela looked up shyly under his golden cloud of hair. 'Folko is Bela's,' he said under his breath. Folko was his pony.

'No,' said Sabran; 'Folko belongs to your mother. She only allows you to have him so long as you are good to him.'

'Bela is always good to him,' he said decidedly.

'Bela is faultless in his own estimation,' said his mother, with a smile. 'He is too little to be wise enough to see himself as he is.'

This view made Bela's blue eyes open very wide and fill very sorrowfully. It was humiliating. He longed to get back to Gela, who always listened to him dutifully, and never said anything in answer except an entirely acquiescent 'Ja! ja!' which was

indeed about the limitation of Gela's lingual powers. In a few moments, indeed, his governess came for him and took him away, a little dainty figure in his ivory velvet and his blue silk stockings, with his long golden curls hanging to his waist.

'It is so difficult to keep him from being spoilt,' she said, as the door closed on him. 'The people make a little prince, a little god, of him. He believes himself to be something wonderful. Gela, who is so gentle and quiet, is left quite in the shade.'

'I suppose Gela takes your title?' said Vàsàrhely to his host. 'It is usual with the Austrian families for the second son to have some distant appellation?'

'They are babies,' said Sabran, impatiently. 'It will be time enough to settle those matters when they are old enough to be court-pages or cadets. They are Bela and Gela at present. The only real republic is childhood.'

'I am afraid Bela is the *tyrannus* to which all republics succumb,' said Wanda, with a smile. 'He is extremely autocratic in his notions, and in his family. In all his "make believe" games he is crowned.'

'He is a beautiful child,' said her cousin, and she answered, still smiling:

'Oh, yes: he is so like Réné!'

Egon Vàsàrhely turned his face from her. The dinner was somewhat dull, and the evening seemed tedious, despite the efforts of Sabran to promote conversation, and the *écarté* which he and his guest played together. They were all sensible that some chord was out of tune, and glad that on the morrow a large house-party would be there to spare them a continuation of this difficult intercourse.

'Your cousin will never forgive me,' said Sabran to her when they were alone. 'I think, beside his feeling that I stand for ever between you and him, there is an impatience of me as a stranger and one unworthy you.'

'You do yourself and him injustice,' she answered. 'I shall be unhappy if you and he be not friends.'

'Then unhappy you will be, my beloved. We both adore you.'

'Do not say that. He would not be here if it were so.'

'Ah! look at him when he looks at Bela!'

She sighed; she had felt a strong emotion on the sight of her cousin, for Egon Vàsàrhely was much changed by these years of pain. His grand carriage and his martial beauty were unaltered, but all the fire and the light of earlier years were gone out of his face, and a certain gloom and austerity had come there. To all other women he would have been the more attractive for the melancholy which was in such apt contrast with the heroic adventures of his life, but to her the change in him was a mute reproach which filled her with remorse though she had done no wrong.

Meantime Prince Egon, throwing open his window, leaned out into the cold rainy night, as though a hand were at his throat and suffocating him. And amidst all the tumult of his pain and revolt, one dim thought was incessantly intruding itself; he was always thinking, as he recalled the face of Sabran and of Sabran's little son, 'Where have I seen those blue eyes, those level brows, those delicate curved lips?'

They were so familiar, yet so strange to him. When he would have given a name to them they receded into the shadows of some far away past of his own, so far away he could not follow them. He sat up half the night letting the wind beat and the rain fall on him. He could not sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

On the morrow thirty or forty people arrived, amongst them Baron Kaulnitz *en congé* from his embassy.

'What think you of Sabran?' he asked of Egon Vàsàrhely, who answered:

'He is a perfect gentleman. He is a charming companion. He plays admirably at *écarté*.'

'*Ecarté*! I spoke of his moral worth: what is your impression of that?'

'If he had not satisfied her as to that, Wanda would not be his wife,' answered the Prince, gravely. 'He has given her beautiful children, and it seems to me that he renders her perfectly happy. We should all be grateful to him.'

'The children are certainly very beautiful,' said Baron Kaulnitz, and said no more.

'The people all around are unfeignedly attached to him,' Vàsàrhely continued with generous effort. 'I hear nothing but his praise. Nor do I think it the conventional compliment which loyalty leads them to pay the husband of their Countess; it is very genuine attachment. The men of the old Archduchy are not easily won; it is only qualities of daring and manliness which appeal to their sympathies. That he has gained their affections is as great testimony to his character in one way as that he has gained Wanda's is in another. At Idrac also the people adore him, and Croats are usually slow to see merit in strangers.'

'In short, he is a paragon,' said the ambassador, with a little dubious smile. 'So much the better, since he is irrevocably connected with us.'

Sabran was at no time seen to greater advantage than when he was required to receive and entertain a large house-party. Always graceful, easily witty, endowed with that winning tact which is to

society as cream is to the palate, the charm he possessed for women and the ascendency he could, at times, exercise over men—even men who were opposed to him—were never more admirably displayed than when he was the master of Hohenszalras, with crowned heads, and princes, and diplomatists, and beauties gathered beneath his roof. His mastery, moreover, of all field sports, and his skill at all games that demanded either intelligence or audacity, made him popular with a hardy and brilliant nobility; his daring in a boar hunt at noon was equalled by his science at whist in the evening. Strongly prejudiced against him at the onset, the great nobles who were his guests had long ceased to feel anything for him except respect and regard; whilst the women admired him none the less for the unwavering devotion to his wife which made even the conventionalities of ordinary flirtation wholly impossible to him. With all his easy gallantry and his elegant homage to them, they all knew that, at heart, he was as cold as the rocks to all women save one.

'It is really the knight's love for his lady,' said the Countess Brancka once; and Sabran, overhearing, said: 'Yes, and I think that if there were more like my lady on earth, knighthood might revive on other scenes than Wagner's.'

Between him and the Countess Brancka there was a vague intangible enmity, veiled under the perfection of courtesy. They could ill have told why they disliked each other; but they did so. Beneath their polite or trivial or careless speech they often aimed at each other's feelings or foibles with accuracy and malice. She had stayed at Hohenszalras more or less time each year in the course of her flight between France and Vienna, and was there now. He admired his wife's equanimity and patience under the trial of Mdme. Olga's frivolities, but he did not himself forbear from as much sarcasm as was possible in a man of the world to one who was his guest, and by marriage his relative, and he was sensible of her enmity to himself, though she paid him many compliments, and sometimes too assiduously sought his companionship. '*Elle fait le ronron, mais gare à ses pattes*!' he said once to his wife concerning her.

Sabran appraised her indeed with unflattering accuracy. He knew by heart all the wiles and wisdom of such a woman as she was. Her affectations did not blind him to her real danger, and her exterior frivolity did not conceal from him the keen and subtle self-interest and the strong passions which laboured beneath it.

She felt that she had an enemy in him, and partly in self-protection, partly in malice, she set herself to convert a foe into a friend, perhaps, without altogether confessing it to herself, into a lover as well.

The happiness that prevailed at Hohenszalrasburg annoyed her for no other reason than that it wearied her to witness it. She did not envy it, because she did not want happiness at all; she wanted

perpetual change, distraction, temptation, passion, triumph—in a word, excitement, which becomes the drug most unobtainable to those who have early exhausted all the experiences and varieties of pleasure.

Mdme. Brancka had always an unacknowledged resentment against her sister-in-law, for being the owner of all the vast possessions of the Szalras. 'If Gela had lived!' she thought constantly. 'If I had only had a son by him before he died, this woman would have had her dower and nothing more.' That his sister should possess all, whilst she had by her later marriage lost her right even to a share in that vast wealth, was a perpetual bitterness to her.

Stefan Brancka was indeed rich, but he was an insensate gambler. She was extravagant to the last degree, with all the costly caprices of a *cocodette* who reigned in the two most brilliant capitals of the world. They were often troubled by their own folly, and again and again the generosity of his elder brother had rescued them from humiliating embarrassments. At such moments she had almost hated Wanda von Szalras for these large possessions, of which, according to her own views, her sister-in-law made no use whatever. Meantime, she wished Egon Vàsàrhely to die childless, and to that end had not been unwilling for the woman he loved to marry any one else. She had reasoned that the Szalras estates would go to the Crown or the Church if Wanda did not marry; whilst all the power and possessions of Egon Vàsàrhely must, if he had no sons, pass in due course to his brother. She had the subtle acuteness of her race, and she had the double power of being able at once to wait very patiently and to spring with swift rage on what she needed. To her sister-in-law she always appeared a mere flutterer on the breath of fashion. The grave and candid nature of the one could not follow or perceive the intricacies of the other.

'She is a cruel woman and a perilous one,' Sabran said one day, to his wife's surprise.

She answered him that Olga Brancka had always seemed to her a mere frivolous *mondaine*, like so many others of their world.

'No,' he persisted. 'You are wrong; she is not a butterfly. She has too much energy. She is a profoundly immoral woman also. Look at her eyes.'

'That is Stefan's affair,' she answered, 'not ours. He is indifferent.'

'Or unsuspicious? Did your brother care for her?'

'He was madly in love with her. She was only sixteen when he married her. He fell at Solferino half a year later. When she married my cousin it shocked and disgusted me. Perhaps I was foolish to take it thus, but it seemed such a sin against Gela. To die *so*, and not to be even remembered!'

'Did your cousin Egon approve this second marriage?'

'No, he opposed it; he had our feeling about it. But Stefan, though very young, was beyond any control. He had the fortune as he had the title of his mother, the Countess Brancka, and Olga bewitched him as she had done my brother.'

'She *is* a witch, a wicked witch,' said Sabran.

The great autumn party was brilliant and agreeable. All things went well, and the days were never monotonous. The people were well assorted, and the social talent of their host made their outdoor sports and their indoor pastimes constantly varied, whilst Hungarian musicians and Viennese comedians played waltzes that would have made a statue dance, and represented the little comedies for which he himself had been famous at the Mirlitons.

He was not conscious of it, but he was passionately eager for Egon Vàsàrhely to be witness, not only of his entire happiness, but of his social powers. To Vàsàrhely he seemed to put forward the perfection of his life with almost insolence; with almost exaggeration to exhibit the joys and the gifts with which nature and chance had so liberally dowered him. The stately Magyar soldier, sitting silent and melancholy apart, watched him with a curious pang, that in a lesser nature would have been a consuming envy. Now and then, though Sabran and his wife spoke rarely to each other in the presence of others, a glance, a smile, a word passed between them that told of absolute unuttered tenderness, profound and inexhaustible as the deep seas; in the very sound of their laughter, in the mere accent of their voices, in a careless caress to one of their children, in a light touch of the hand to one another as they rode, or as they met in a room, there was the expression of a perfect joy, of a perfect faith between them, which pierced the heart of the watcher of it. Yet would he not have had it otherwise at her cost.

'Since she has chosen him as the companion of her life, it is well that he should be what she can take pride in, and what all men can praise, he thought, and yet the happiness of this man seemed to him an audacity, an insolence. What human lover could merit her?

Between himself and Sabran there was the most perfect courtesy, but no intimacy. They both knew that if for fifty years they met continually they would never be friends. All her endeavours to produce sympathy between them failed. Sabran was conscious of a constant observation of him by her cousin, which seemed to him to have a hostile motive, and which irritated him extremely, though he did not allow his irritation any visible vent. Olga Brancka perceived, and with the objectless malice of women of her temperament, amused herself with fanning, the slumbering enmity, as children play at fire.

'You cannot expect Egon to love you,' she said once to her host. 'You know he was the betrothed of Wanda from her

childhood—at least in his own hopes, and in the future sketched for them by their families.'

'I was quite aware of that before I married,' he answered her, indifferently. 'But those family arrangements are tranquil disposals of destiny which, if they be disturbed, leave no great trace of trouble. The Prince is young still, and a famous soldier as well as a great noble. He has no lack of consolation if he need it, and I cannot believe that he does.'

Mdme. Olga laughed.

'You know as well as I do that Egon adores the very stirrup your wife's foot touches!'

'I know he is her much beloved cousin,' said Sabran, in a tone which admitted of no reply.

To Vàsàrhely his sister-in-law said confidentially:

'Dear Egon, why did you not stay on the *pusztas* or remain with your hussars? You make *le beau* Sabran jealous.'

'Jealous!' asked Vàsàrhely, with a bitter smile. 'He has much cause, when she has neither eye nor ear, neither memory nor thought of any kind for any living thing except himself and those children who are all his very portraits! Why do you say these follies, Olga? You know that my cousin Wanda chose her lord out of all the world, and loves him as no one would have supposed she had it in her to love any mortal creature.'

He spoke imperiously, harshly, and she was silenced.

'What do you think of him?' she said with hesitation.

'Every one asks me that question. I am not his keeper!'

'But you must form some opinion. He is virtual lord of Hohenszalras, and I believe she has made over to him all the appanages of Idrac, and his children will have everything.'

'Are they not her natural heirs? Who should inherit from her if not her sons?'

'Of course, of course they will inherit, only they inherit nothing from him. It was certainly a great stroke of fortune for a landless gentleman to make. Why does the *gentilhomme pauvre* always so captivate women?'

'What do you mean to insinuate, Olga?' he asked her, with a stern glance of his great black eyes.'

'Oh, nothing; only his history was peculiar. I remember his arrival in France, his first appearance in society; it is many years ago now. All the Faubourg received him, but some said at the time that it was too romantic to be true—those Mexican forests, that long exile of the Sabran, the sudden appearance of this beautiful young marquis; you will grant it was romantic. I suppose it was the romance that made even Wanda's clear head turn a little. It is a *vin capiteux* for many women. And then such a life in Paris after it—duels, baccara, bonnes fortunes, clever comedies, a touch like Liszt's, a sudden success in the Chamber—it was all so romantic; it was bound to bring him at last to his

haven, the Prince Charmant of an enchanted castle! Only enchanted castles sometimes grow dull, and Princes Charmants are not always amusable by the same châtelaine!'

Egon Vàsàrhely, with his eyes sombre under their long black lashes, listened to the easy bantering phrases with the vague suspicion of an honest and slow-witted man that a woman is trying to drop poison into his ear which she wishes to pass as *eau sucrée*. He did not altogether follow her insinuation, but he understood something of her drift. They were alone in a corner of the ball-room, whilst the cotillon was at its height, conducted by Sabran, who had been famous for its leadership in Paris and Vienna. He stooped his head and looked her full in her eyes.

'Look here, Olga. I am not sure what you mean, but I believe you are tired of seeing my cousin's happiness, merely because it is something with which you cannot interfere. For myself I would protect her happiness as I would her honour if I thought either endangered. Whether you or I like the Marquis de Sabran is wholly beyond the question. She loves him, and she has made him one of us. His honour is now ours. For myself I would defend him in his absence as though he were my own brother. Not for his sake at all—for hers. I do not express myself very well, but you know what I mean. Here is Max returning to claim you.'

Silenced and a little alarmed the Countess Brancka rose and went off to her place in the cotillon.

Vàsàrhely, sitting where she had left him, watched the mazes of the cotillon, the rhythm of the tzigane musicians coming to his ear freighted with a thousand familiar memories of the czardas danced madly in the long Hungarian nights. Time had been when the throb of the tzigane strings had stirred all his pulses like magic, but now all his bold bright life seemed numb and frozen in him.

His eyes rested on his cousin, where she stood conversing with a crown prince, who was her chief guest, and passed from her to follow the movements of Sabran, who with supreme ease and elegance was leading a new intricate measure down the ball-room.

She was happy, that he could not doubt. Every action, every word, every glance said so with a meaning not to be doubted. He thought she had never looked so handsome as she did to-night since that far away day in her childhood when he had seen her with the red and white roses in her lap and the crown upon her curls. She had the look of her childhood in her eyes, that serene and glad light which had been dimmed by her brothers' death, but now shone there again tranquil, radiant, and pure as sunlight is. She wore white velvet and white brocade; her breast was hidden in white roses; she wore her famous pearls and the ribbons of the Starred Cross of Austria and of the Prussian Order of

Merit; she held in her hand a large painted fan which had belonged to Maria Theresa. Every now and then, as she talked with her royal guest, her glance strayed down the room to where her husband was, and lingered there a moment with a little smile.

Vàsàrhely watched her for awhile, then rose abruptly, and made his way out of the ball-room and the state apartments down the corridors of the old house he knew so well towards his own chamber. He thought he would write to her and leave upon the morrow. What need was there for him to stay on in this perpetual pain? He had done enough for the world, which had seen him under the roof of Hohenszalras.

As he took his way through the long passages, tapestry-hung or oak-panelled, which led across the great building to his own set of rooms in the clock tower, he passed an open door out of which a light was streaming. As he glanced within he saw it was the children's sleeping apartment, of which the door was open because the night was warm, unusually warm for the heart of the Gross Glöckner mountains. An impulse he could not have explained made him pause and enter. The three little white beds of carved Indian work, with curtains of lace, looked very snowy and peaceful in the pale light from a hanging lamp. The children were all asleep; the one nearest the door was Bela.

Vàsàrhely stood and looked at him. His head was thrown back on his pillow and his arms were above his head. His golden hair, which was cut straight and low over his forehead, had been pushed back in his slumber; he looked more like his father than in his waking hours, for as he dreamed there was a look of coldness and of scorn upon his childish face, which made him so resemble Sabran that the man who looked on him drew his breath hard with pain.

The night-nurse rose from her seat, recognising Prince Egon, whom she had known from his childhood.

'The little Count is so like the Marquis,' she said, approaching; 'so is Herr Gela. Ah, my Prince, you remember the noble gentlemen whose names they bear? God send they may be like them in their lives and not their deaths!'

'An early death is good,' said Vàsàrhely, as he stood beside the child's bed. He thought how good it would have been if he had fallen at Sadowa or Königsgratz, or earlier by the side of Gela and Victor, charging with his White Hussars.

The old nurse rambled on, full of praise and stories of the children's beauty, and strength, and activity, and intelligence. Vàsàrhely did not hear her; he stood lost in thought looking down on the sleeping figure of Bela, who, as if conscious of strange eyes upon him, moved uneasily in his slumber, and ruffled his golden hair with his hands, and thrust off his coverings from his beautiful round white limbs.

'Count Bela is not like our saint who died,' said the old nurse. 'He is always masterful, and loves his own way. My lady is strict with him, and wisely so, for he is a proud rebellious child. But he is very generous and has noble ways. Count Gela is a little angel; he will be like the Heilige Graf.'

Vàsàrhely did not hear anything she said. His gaze was bent on the sleeping child, studying the lines of the delicate brows, of the curving lips, of the long black lashes. It was so familiar, so familiar! Suddenly as he gazed a light seemed to leap out of the darkness of long forgotten years, and the memory which had haunted him stood out clear before him.

'He is like Vassia Kazán!' he cried, half aloud. The face of the child had recalled what in the face of the man had for ever eluded his remembrance.

He thrust a gold coin in the nurse's hand, and hurried from the chamber. A sudden inconceivable, impossible suspicion had leaped up before him as he had gazed on the sleeping loveliness of Sabran's little son.

The old woman saw his sudden pallor, his uncertain gesture, and thought, 'Poor gallant gentleman! He wishes these pretty boys were his own. Well, it might have been better if he had been master here, though there is nothing to say against the one who is so. Still, a stranger is always a stranger, and foreign blood is bad.'

Then she drew the coverings over Bela's naked little limbs, and passed on to make sure that the little Ottilie, who had been born when the primroses were first out in the Iselthal woods, was sleeping soundly, and wanted nothing.

Vàsàrhely made his way to his own chamber, and there sat down heavily, mechanically, like a man waking out from a bad dream.

His memory went back to twenty years before, when he, a little lad, had accompanied his father on a summer visit to the house of a Russian, Prince Paul Zabaroff. It was a house, gay, magnificent, full of idle men and women of facile charm; it was not a house for youth; but both the Prince Vàsàrhely and the Prince Zabaroff were men of easy morals—*viveurs*, gamesters, and philosophers, who at fifteen years old themselves had been lovers and men of the world. At that house had been present a youth, some years older than he was, who was known as Vassia Kazán; a youth whose beauty and wit made him the delight of the women there, and whose skill at games and daring in sports won him the admiration of the men. It was understood without even being said openly that Vassia Kazán was a natural son of the Prince Zabaroff. The little Hungarian Prince, child as he was, had wit enough and enough knowledge of life to understand that this brilliant companion of his was base-born. His kind heart moved him to pity, but his intense pride curbed his pity with

contempt. Vassia Kazán had resented the latter too bitterly to even be conscious of the first. The gentlemen assembled had diverted themselves by the unspoken feud that had soon risen between the boys, and the natural intelligence of the little Magyar noble had been no match for the subtle and cultured brain of the Parisian Lycéen.

One day one of the lovely ladies there, who plundered Zabaroff and caressed his son, amused herself with a war of words between the lads, and so heated, stung, spurred and tormented the Hungarian boy that, exasperated by the sallies and satires of his foe, and by the presence of this lovely goddess of discord, he so far forgot his chivalry that he turned on Vassia with a taunt. 'You would be a serf if you were in Russia!' he said, with his great black eyes flashing the scorn of the noble on the bastard. Without a word, Vassia, who had come in from riding and had his whip in his hand, sprang on him, held him in a grip of steel, and thrashed him. The fiery Magyar, writhing under the blows of one who to him was as a slave, as a hound, freed his right arm, snatched from a table near an Oriental dagger lying there with other things of value, and plunged it into the shoulder of his foe. The cries of the lady, alarmed at her own work, brought the men in from the adjoining room; the boys were forced apart and carried to their chambers.

Prince Vàsàrhely left the house that evening with his son, still furious and unappeased. Vassia Kazán remained, made a hero of and nursed by the lovely woman who had thrown the apple of strife. His wound was healed in three weeks' time: soon after his father's house-party was scattered, and he himself returned to his college. Not a syllable passed between him and Zabaroff as to his quarrel with the little Hungarian magnate. To the woman who had wrought the mischief Zabaroff said: 'Almost I wish he were my lawful son. He is a true wolf of the steppes. Paris has only combed his hide and given him a silken coat; he is still a wolf, like all true Russians.'

Looking on the sleeping child of Sabran, all that half-forgotten scene had risen up before the eyes of Egon Vàsàrhely. He seemed to see the beautiful fair face of Vassia Kazán, with the anger on the knitted brows, and the ferocity on the delicate stern lips as he had raised his arm to strike. Twenty years had gone by; he himself, whenever he had remembered the scene, had long grown ashamed of the taunt he had cast, not of the blow he had given, for the sole reproof his father had ever made him was to say: 'A noble only insults his equals. To insult an inferior is ungenerous, it is derogatory; whom you offend you raise for the hour to a level with yourself. Remember to choose your foes not less carefully than you choose your friends.'

Why with the regard, the voice, the air of Sabran had some vague intangible remembrance always come before him?

Why, as he had gazed on the sleeping child, had the vague uncertainty suddenly resolved itself into distinct revelation?

'He is Vassia Kazán! He is Vassia Kazán!' he said to himself a score of times stupidly, persistently, as one speaks in a dream. Yet he knew he must be a prey to delusion, to phantasy, to accidental resemblance. He told himself so. He resisted his own folly, and all the while a subtler inner consciousness seemed to be speaking in him, and saying to him:

That man is Vassia Kazán. Surely he is Vassia Kazán.'

And then the loyal soul of him strengthened itself and made him think:

'Even if he be Vassia Kazán he is her husband. He is what she loves; he is the father of those children that are hers.'

He never went to his bed that night. When the music ceased at an hour before dawn, and the great house grew silent, he still sat there by the open casement, glad of the cold air that blew in from over the Szalrassee, as with daybreak a fine film of rain began to come down the mountain sides.

Once he heard the voice of Sabran, who passed the door on his way to his own apartment. Sabran was saying in German with a little laugh:

'My lady! I am jealous of your crown prince. When I left him now in his chamber I was disposed to immortalise myself by regicide. He adores you!'

Then he heard Wanda laugh in answer, with some words that did not reach his ear as they passed on farther down the corridor. Vàsàrhely shivered, and instinctively rose to his feet. He felt as if he must seek him out and cry out to him:

'Am I mad or is it true? Let me see your shoulder—have you the mark of the wound that I gave? Your little child has the face of Vassia Kazán. Are you Vassia Kazán? Are you the bastard of Zabaroff? Are you the wolf of the steppes?'

He had desired to go from Hohenszalras, where every hour was pain to him, but now he felt an irresistible fascination in the vicinity of Sabran. His mind was in that dual state which at once rejects a fact as incredible, and believes in it absolutely. His reason told him that his suspicion was a folly; his instinct told him that it was a truth.

When in the forenoon the castle again became animated, and the guests met to the mid-day breakfast in the hall of the knights, he descended, moved by an eagerness that made him for the first time in his life nervous. When Sabran addressed him he felt himself grow pale; he followed the movements, he watched the features, he studied the tones of his successful rival, with an intense absorption in them. Through the hunting breakfast, at which only men were present, he was conscious of nothing that was addressed to him; he only seemed to hear a voice in his ear saying perpetually—'Yonder is Vassia Kazán.'

The day was spent in sport, sport rough and real, that gave fair play to the beasts and perilous exposure to the hunters. For the first time in his life, Egon Vàsàrhely let a brown bear go by him untouched, and missed more than one roebuck. His eyes were continually seeking his host; a mile off down a forest glade the figure of Sabran seemed to fill his vision, a figure full of grace and dignity, clad in a hunting-dress of russet velvet, with a hunting horn slung at his side on a broad chain of gold, the gift of his wife in memory of the fateful day when he had aimed at the *kuttengeier* in her woods.

Sabran of necessity devoted himself to the crown prince throughout the day's sport; only in the twilight as they returned he spoke to Vàsàrhely.

'Wanda is so full of regret that you wish to leave us,' he said, with graceful cordiality; 'if only I can persuade you to remain, I shall take her the most welcome of all tidings from the forest. Stay at the least another week, the weather has cleared.'

As he spoke he thought that Vàsàrhely looked at him strangely; but he knew that he could not be much loved by his wife's cousin, and continued with good humour to persist in his request. Abruptly, the other answered him at last:

'Wanda wishes me to stay? Well, I will stay then. It seems strange to hear a stranger invite *me* to Hohenszalras.'

Sabran coloured; he said with hauteur:

'That I am a stranger to Prince Vàsàrhely is not my fault. That I have the right to invite him to Hohenszalras is my happiness, due to his cousin's goodness, which has been far beyond my merit.'

Vàsàrhely's eyes dwelt on him gloomily: he was sensible of the dignity, the self-command, and the delicacy of reproof which were blent in the answer he had received; he felt humbled and convicted of ill-breeding. He said after a pause:

'I should ask your pardon. My cousin would be the first to condemn my words; they sounded ill, but I meant them literally. Hohenszalras has been one of my homes from boyhood; it will be your son's when we are both dead. How like he is to you! he has nothing of his mother.'

Sabran, somewhat surprised, smiled as he answered:

'He is very like me. I regret it; but you know the poets and the physiologists are for once agreed as to the cause of that. It is a truth proved a million times: *l'enfant de l'amour ressemble toujours au père.*'

Egon Vàsàrhely grew white under the olive hue of his sun-bronzed cheek. The *riposte* had been made with a thrust that went home. Otto at that moment approached his master for orders for the morrow. They were no more alone. They entered the house; the long and ceremonious dinner succeeded. Vàsàrhely was silent and stern. Sabran was the most brilliant of hosts, the happiest of

men; all the women present were in love with him, his wife the most of all.

'Réné tells me you will stay, Egon. I am so very glad,' his cousin said to him during the evening, and she added with a little hesitation, 'If you would take time to know him well, you would find him so worthy of your regard; he has all the qualities that most men esteem in each other. It would make me so happy if you were friends at heart, not only in mere courtesy.'

'You know that can never be,' said Vàsàrhely, almost rudely. 'Even you cannot work miracles. He is your husband. It is a reason that I should respect him, but it is also a reason why I shall for ever hate him.'

He said the last words in a tone scarcely audible, but, low as it was, there was a force in it that affected her painfully.

'What you say there is quite unworthy of you,' she said with gentleness but coldness. 'He has done you no wrong. Long ere I met him I told you that what you wished was not what I wished, never would be so. You are too great a gentleman, Egon, to nourish an injustice in your heart.'

He looked down; every fibre in him thrilled and burned under the sound of her voice, the sense of her presence.

'I saw your children asleep last night,' he said abruptly. 'They have nothing of you in them; they are his image.'

'Is it so unusual for children to resemble their father?' she said with a smile, whilst vaguely disquieted by his tone.

'No, I suppose not; but the Szalras have always been of one type. How came your husband by that face? I have seen it amongst the Circassians, the Persians, the Georgians; but you say he is a Breton.'

'The Sabrans of Romaris are Bretons; you have only to consult history. Very beautiful faces like his have seldom much impress of nationality; they always seem as though they followed the old Greek laws, and were cast in the divine heroic mould of another time than ours.'

'Who was his mother?'

'A Spanish Mexican.'

Vàsàrhely was silent.

His cousin left him and went amongst her guests. A vague sense of uneasiness went with her at her consciousness of his hostility to Sabran. She wished she had not asked him to remain.

'You have never offended Egon?' she asked Sabran anxiously that night. 'You have always been forbearing and patient with him?'

'I have obeyed you in that as in all things, my angel,' he answered her lightly. 'What would you? He is in love with you still, and I have married you! It is even a crime in his eyes that my children resemble me! One can never argue with a passion that is unhappy. It is a kind of frenzy.'

She heard with some impatience.

'He has no right to cherish such a resentment. He keeps it alive by brooding on it. I had hoped that when he saw you here, saw how happy you render me, saw your children too, he would grow calmer, wiser, more reconciled to the inevitable.'

'You did not know men, my love,' said Sabran, with a smile.

To him the unhappiness and the ill-will of Egon Vàsàrhely were matters of supreme indifference; in a manner they gratified him, they even supplied that stimulant of rivalry which a man's passion needs to keep it at its height in the calm of safe possession. That Egon Vàsàrhely saw his perfect happiness lent it pungency and a keener sense of victory. When he kissed his wife's hand in the sight of her cousin, the sense of the pain it dealt to the spectator gave the trivial action to him all the sweetness and the ardour of the first caresses of his accepted passion.

Of that she knew nothing. It would have seemed to her ignoble, as so much that makes up men's desire always does seem to a woman of her temperament, even whilst it dominates and solicits her, and forces her to share something of its own intoxication.

'Egon is very unreasonable,' said Mdme. Ottilie. 'He believes that if you had not met Réné you would have in time loved himself. It is foolish. Love is a destiny. Had you married him you would not have loved him. He would soon have perceived that and been miserable, much more miserable than he is now, for he would have been unable to release you. I think he should not have come here at all if he could not have met M. de Sabran with at least equanimity.'

'I think so, too,' said Wanda, and an impatience against her cousin began to grow into anger; without being conscious of it, she had placed Sabran so high in her own esteem that she could forgive none who did not adore her own idol. It was a weakness in her that was lovely and touching in a character that had had before hardly enough of the usual foibles of humanity. Every error of love is lovable.

Vàsàrhely could not dismiss from his mind the impression which haunted him.

'I conclude you knew the Marquis de Sabran well in France?' he said one day to Baron Kaulnitz, who was still there.

Kaulnitz demurred.

'No, I cannot say that I did. I knew him by repute; that was not very pure. However, the Faubourg always received and sustained him; the Comte de Chambord did the same; they were the most interested. One cannot presume to think they could be deceived.'

'Deceived!' echoed Prince Egon. 'What a singular word to use! Do you mean to imply the possibility of—of any falsity on his part—any intrigue to appear what he is not?'

'No,' said Kaulnitz, with hesitation. 'Honestly, I cannot say so much. An impression was given me at the moment of his signing his marriage contract that he concealed something; but it was a mere suspicion. As I told you, the whole Legitimist world, the most difficult to enter, the most incredulous of assumption, received him with open arms. All his papers were of unimpeachable regularity. There was never a doubt hinted by any one, and yet I will confess to you, my dear Egon, since we are speaking in confidence, that I have had always my own doubts as to his marquisate of Sabran.'

'*Grosser Gott*!' exclaimed Vàsàrhely, as he started from his seat. 'Why did you not stop the marriage?'

'One does not stop a marriage by a mere baseless suspicion,' replied Kaulnitz. 'I have not one shadow of reason for my probably quite unwarranted conjecture. It merely came into my mind also at the signing of the contracts. I had already done all I could to oppose the marriage, but Wanda was inflexible—you are witness of the charm he still possesses for her—and even the Princess was scarcely less infatuated. Besides, it must be granted that few men are more attractive in every way; and as he *is* one of us, whatever else he be, his honour is now our honour, as you said yourself the other day.'

'One could always kill him,' muttered Vàsàrhely, 'and set her free so, if one were sure.'

'Sure of what?' said Kaulnitz, rather alarmed at the effect of his own words. 'You Magyar gentlemen always think that every knot can be cut with a sword. If he were a mere adventurer (which is hardly possible) it would not mend matters for you to run him through the heart; there are his children.'

'Would the marriage be legal if his name were assumed?'

'Oh, no! She could have it annulled, of course, both by Church and Law. All those pretty children would have no rights and no name. But we are talking very wildly and in a theatrical fashion. He is as certainly Marquis de Sabran as I am Karl von Kaulnitz.'

Vàsàrhely said nothing; his mind was in tumult, his heart oppressed by a sense of secresy and of a hope that was guilty and mean.

He did not speak to his companion of Vassia Kazán, but his conjecture seemed to hover before his sight like a black cloud which grew bigger every hour.

He remained at Hohenszalras throughout the autumnal festivities. He felt as if he could not go away with that doubt still unsolved, that suspicion either confirmed or uprooted. His cousin grew as uneasy at his presence there as she had before been uneasy at his absence. Her instinct told her that he was the foe of the one dearest to her on earth. She felt that the gallant and generous temper of him had changed and grown morose; he was taciturn, moody, solitary.

He spent almost all his time out of doors, and devoted himself to the hardy sport of the mountains and forests with a sort of rage. Guests came and went at the castle; some were imperial, some royal people; there was always a brilliant circle of notable persons there, and Sabran played his part as their host with admirable tact, talent, and good humour. His wit, his amiability, his many accomplishments, and his social charm were in striking contrast to the sombre indifference of Vàsàrhely, whom men had no power to amuse and women no power to interest. Prince Egon was like a magnificent picture by Rembrandt, as he sat in his superb uniform in a corner of a ball-room with the collars of his orders blazing with jewels, and his hands crossed on the diamond-studded hilt of his sword; but he was so mute, so gloomy, so austere, that the vainest coquette there ceased to hope to please him, and his most cordial friends found his curt contemptuous replies destroy their desire for his companionship.

Wanda, who was frankly and fondly attached to him, began to long for his departure. The gaze of his black eyes, fixed in their fire and gloom on the little gay figures of her children, filled her with a vague apprehension.

'If he would only find some one and be happy,' she thought, with anger at this undesired and criminal love which clung to her so persistently.

'Am I made of wax?' he said to her with scorn, when she ventured to hint at her wishes.

'How I wish I had not asked him to remain here!' she said to herself many times. It was not possible for her to dismiss her cousin, who had been from his infancy accustomed to look on the Hohenszalrasburg as his second home. But as circle after circle of guests came, went, and were replaced by others, and Egon Vàsàrhely still retained the rooms in the west tower that had been his from boyhood, his continual presence grew irksome and irritating to her.

'He forgets that it is now my husband's house!' she thought.

There was only one living creature in all the place to whom Vàsàrhely unbent from his sullen and haughty reserve, and that one was the child Bela.

Bela was as beautiful as the morning, with his shower of golden hair, and his eyes like sapphires, and his skin like a lily. With curious self-torture Vàsàrhely would attract the child to him by tales of daring and of sport, and would watch with intent eyes every line of the small face, trying therein to read the secret of the man by whom this child had been begotten. Bela, all unconscious, was proud of this interest displayed in him by this mighty soldier, of whose deeds in war Ulrich and Hubert and Otto told such Homeric tales.

'Bela will fight with you when he is big,' he would say, trying to enclose the jewelled hilt of Vàsàrhely's sword in his tiny fingers,

or trotting after him through the silence of the tapestried corridors. When she saw them thus together she felt that she could understand the superstitious fear of Oriental women when their children are looked at fixedly.

'You are very good to my boy,' she said once to Vàsàrhely, when he had let the child chatter by his side for hours.

Vàsàrhely turned away abruptly.

'There are times when I could kill your son, because he is his,' he muttered, 'and there are times when I could worship him, because he is yours.'

'Do not talk so, Egon,' she said, gravely. 'If you will feel so, it is best—I must say it—it is best that you should see neither my child nor me.'

He took no notice of her words.

'The children would always be yours,' he muttered. 'You would never leave him, never disgrace him for their sake; even if one knew—it would be of no use.'

'Dear Egon,' she said, in real distress, 'what strange things are you saying? Are you mad? Whose disgrace do you mean?'

'Let us suppose an extreme case,' he said, with a hard laugh. 'Suppose their father were base, or vile, or faithless, would you hate the children? Surely you would.'

'I have not imagination enough to suppose any such thing,' she said very coldly. 'And you do not know what a mother's love is, my cousin.'

He walked away, leaving her abruptly.

'How strange he grows!' she thought. 'Surely his mind must be touched; jealousy is a sort of madness.'

She bade the children's attendants keep Count Bela more in the nurseries; she told them that the child teased her guests, and must not be allowed to run so often at his will and whim over the house. She never seriously feared that Egon would harm the child: his noble and chivalrous nature could not have changed so cruelly as that; but it hurt her to see his eyes fixed on the son of Sabran with such persistent interrogation and so strange an intensity of observation. It made her think of old Italian tales of the evil eye.

She did not know that Vàsàrhely had come thither with a sincere and devout intention to conquer his jealous hatred of her husband, and to habituate himself to the sight of her in the new relations of her life. She did not know that he would probably have honestly tried to do his duty, and honestly striven to feel at least esteem for one so near to her, if the suspicion which had become almost certainty in his own mind had not made him believe that he saw in Sabran a traitor, a bastard, and a criminal whose offences were the deepest of all possible offences, and whose degradation was the lowest of all possible degradation, in the sight of the haughty magnate of Hungary, steeped to the lips in

all the traditions and the convictions of an unsullied nobility. If what he believed were, indeed, the truth, he would hold Sabran lower than any beggar crouching at the gate of his palace in Buda, than any gipsy wandering in the woods of his mountain fortress of Taróc. If what he believed were the truth, no leper would seem to him so loathsome as this brilliant and courtly gentleman to whom his cousin had given her hand, her honour, and her life.

'Doubt, like a raging tooth,' gnawed at his heart, and a hope, which he knew was dishonourable to his chivalry, sprang up in him, vague, timid, and ashamed. If, indeed, it were as he believed, would not such crime, proven on the sinner, part him for ever from the pure, proud life of Wanda von Szalras? And then, as he thought thus, he groaned in spirit, remembering the children—the children with their father's face and their father's taint in them, for ever living witnesses of their mother's surrender to a lying hound.

'Your cousin cannot be said to contribute to the gaiety of your house-parties, my love,' Sabran observed with a smile one day, when they received the announcement of an intended visit from one of the archdukes. Egon Vàsàrhely was still there, and even his cousin, much as she longed for his departure, could not openly urge it upon him; relationship and hospitality alike forbade.

'He is sadly changed,' she answered. 'He was always silent, but he is now morose. Perhaps he lives too much at Taróc, where all is very wild and solitary.'

'He lives too much in your memory,' said Sabran, with no compassion. 'Could he determine to forgive my marriage with you, there would be a chance for him to recover his peace of mind. Only, my Wanda, it is not possible for any man to be consoled for the loss of you.'

'But that is nothing new,' she answered, with impatience. 'If he felt so strongly against you, why did he come here? It was not like his high, chivalrous honour.'

'Perhaps he came with the frank will to be reconciled to his fate,' said Sabran, not knowing how closely he struck the truth, 'and at the sight of you, of all that he lost and that I gained, he cannot keep his resolution.'

'Then he should go away,' she said, with that indifference to all others save the one beloved which all love begets.

'I think he should. But who can tell him so?'

'I did myself the other day. I shall tell him so more plainly, if needful. Who cannot honour you shall be no friend of mine, no guest of ours.'

'Oh, my love!' said Sabran, whose conscience was touched. 'Do not have feud with your relatives for my sake. They are worthier than I.'

The Archduke, with his wife, arrived there on the following day, and Hohenszalras was gorgeous in the September sun, with all the pomp with which the lords of it had always welcomed their Imperial friends. Vàsàrhely looked on as a spectator at a play when he watched its present master receive the Imperial Prince with that supreme ease, grace, and dignity which were so admirably blent in him.

'Can he be but a marvellous comedian?' wondered the man, to whom a bastard was less even than a peasant.

There was nothing of vanity, of effort, of assumption visible in the perfect manner of his host. He seemed to the backbone, in all the difficult subtleties of society, as in the simple, frank intercourse of man and man, that which even Kaulnitz had conceded that he was, *gentilhomme de race*. Could he have been born a serf—bred from the hour's caprice of a voluptuary for a serving-woman?

Vàsàrhely sat mute, sunk so deeply in his own thoughts that all the festivities round him went by like a pageantry on a stage, in which he had no part.

'He looks like the statue of the Commendatore,' said Olga Brancka, who had returned for the archducal visit, as she glanced at the sombre, stately figure of her brother-in-law. Sabran, to whom she spoke, laughed with a little uneasiness. Would the hand of Egon Vàsàrhely ever seize him and drag him downward like the hand of the statue in *Don Giovanni*?

'What a pity that Wanda did not marry him, and that I did not marry you!' said Mdme. Brancka, saucily, but with a certain significance of meaning.

'You do me infinite honour!' he answered. 'But, at the risk of seeming most ungallant, I must confess the truth. I am grateful that the gods arranged matters as they are. You are enchanting, Madame Olga, as a guest, but as a wife—alas! who can drink *kümmel* every day?'

She smiled enchantingly, showing her pretty teeth, but she was bitterly angered. She had wished for a compliment at the least. 'What can these men see in Wanda?' she thought savagely. 'She is handsome, it is true; but she has no coquetry, no animation, no passion. She is dressed by Worth, and has a marvellous quantity of old jewels; but for that no one would say anything of her except that she was much too tall and had a German face!' And she persuaded herself that it was so; if the Venus de Medici could be animated into life, women would only remark that her waist was large.

Mdme. Olga was still very lovely, and took care to be never seen except at her loveliest. She always treated Sabran with a great familiarity, which his wife was annoyed by, though she did not display her annoyance. Mdme. Brancka always called him *mon cousin* or *beau cousin* in the language she usually used, and affected much more previous knowledge of him than their

acquaintance warranted, since it had been merely such slight intimacy as results from moving in the same society. She was small and slight, but of great spirit; she shot, fished, rode, and played billiards with equal skill; she affected an adoration of the most dangerous sports, and even made a point of sharing the bear and the boar hunt. Wanda, who, though a person of much greater real courage, abhorred all the cruelties and ferocities that perforce accompany sport, saw her with some irritation go out with Sabran on these expeditions.

'Women are utterly out of place in such sport as that, Olga,' she urged to her; 'and indeed are very apt to bring the men into peril, for of course no man can take care of himself whilst he has the safety of a woman to attend to; she must of necessity distract and trouble him.'

But the Countess Stefan only laughed, and slipped with affectation her jewelled hunting-knife into its place in her girdle.

Throughout the Archduke's visit, and after the Prince's departure, Vàsàrhely continued to stay on, whilst a succession of other guests came and went, and the summer deepened into autumn. He felt that he could not leave his cousin's house with that doubt unsolved; yet he knew that he might stay on for ever with no more certainty to reward him and confirm his suspicions than he possessed now. His presence annoyed his host, but Sabran was too polished a gentleman to betray his irritation; sometimes Vàsàrhely shunned his presence and his conversation for days together, at other times he sought them, and rode with him, shot with him, and played cards with him, in the vain hope of gathering from some chance admission or allusion some clue to Sabran's early days. But a perfectly happy man is not given at any time to retrospection, and Sabran less than most men loved his past. He would gladly have forgotten everything that he had ever done or said before his marriage at the Hofburg.

The intellectual powers and accomplishments of Sabran dazzled Vàsàrhely with a saddened sense of inferiority. Like most great soldiers he had a genuine humility in his measurement of himself. He knew that he had no talents except as a leader of cavalry. 'It is natural that she never looked at me,' he thought, 'when she had once seen this man, with his wit, his grace, his facility.' He could not even regard the skill of Sabran in the arts, in the salon, in the theatre with the contempt which the 'Wild Boar of Taróc' might have felt for a mere maker of music, a squire of dames, a writer of sparkling little comedies, a painter of screens, because he knew that both at Idrac and in France Sabran had showed himself the possessor of those martial and virile qualities, by the presence or the absence of which the Hungarian noble measured all men. He himself could only love well and live well; he reflected sadly that honesty and honour are not alone enough to draw love in return.

As the weeks passed on, his host grew so accustomed to his presence there that it ceased to give him offence or cause him anxiety.

'He is not amusing, and he is not always polite,' he said to his wife, 'but if he likes to consume his soul in gazing at you, I am not jealous, my Wanda; and so taciturn a rival would hardly ever be a dangerous one.'

'Do not jest about it,' she answered him, with some real pain. 'I should be very vexed at his remaining here, were it not that I feel sure he will in time learn to live down his regrets, and to esteem and appreciate you.'

'Who knows but his estimation of me may not be the right one?' said Sabran, with a pang of sad self-knowledge. And although he did not attach any significance to the prolonged sojourn of the lord of Taróc and Mohacs, he began to desire once more that his guest would return to the solitudes of the Carlowitz vineyards, or of the Karpathian mountains and gorges of snow.

When over seven weeks had passed by, Vàsàrhely himself began to think that to stay in the Iselthal was useless and impossible, and he had heard from Taróc tidings which annoyed him—that his brother Stefan and his wife, availing themselves of his general permission to visit any one of his places when they chose, had so strained the meaning of the permission that they had gone to his castle, with a score of their Parisian friends, and were there keeping high holiday and festival, to the scandal of his grave old stewards, and their own exceeding diversion. Hospitable to excess as he was, the liberty displeased him, especially as his men wrote him word that his favourite horses were being ruined by overdriving, and in the list of the guests which they sent him were the names of more than one too notorious lady, against whose acquaintance he had repeatedly counselled Olga Brancka. He would not have cared much what they had done at any other of his houses, but at Taróc, his mother, whom he had adored, had lived and died, and the place was sacred to him.

He determined to tear himself away from Hohenszalras, and go and scatter these gay unbidden revellers in the dusky Karpathian ravines. 'I cannot stay here for ever,' he thought, 'and I might be here for years without acquiring any more certainty than my own conviction. Either I am wrong, or he has nothing to conceal, or if I be right he is too wary to betray himself. If only I could see his shoulder where I struck the dagger—but I cannot go into his bath-room and say to him, "You are Vassia Kazán!"'

He resolved to leave on the day after the morrow. For the next day there was organised on a large scale a hunting party, to which the nobility of the Tauern had been bidden. There were only some half-dozen men then staying in the Burg, most of them Austrian soldiers. The delay gave him the chance he longed for,

which but for an accident he might never have had, though he had tarried there half a century.

Early in the morning there was a great breakfast in the Rittersäal, at which Wanda did not appear. Sabran received the nobles and gentry of the province, and did the honours of his table with his habitual courtliness and grace. He was not hospitable in Vàsàrhely's sense of the word: he was too easily wearied by others, and too contemptuous of ordinary humanity; but he was alive to the pleasure of being lord of Hohenszalras, and sensible of the favour with which he was looked upon by a nobility commonly so exclusive and intolerant of foreign invasion.

Breakfast over, the whole party went out and up into the high woods. The sport at Hohenszalras always gave fair play to beast and bird. In deference to the wishes of his wife, Sabran would have none of those battues which make of the covert or the forest a slaughter-house. He himself disdained that sort of sport, and liked danger and adventure to mingle with his out-of-door pastimes. Game fairly found by the spaniel or the pointer; the boar, the wolf, the bear, honestly started and given its fair chance of escape or revenge; the steinbock stalked in a long hard day with peril and effort—these were all delightful to him on occasion; but for the crowded drive, the horde of beaters, the terrified bewildered troop of forest denizens driven with sticks on to the very barrels of the gunners, for this he had the boundless contempt of a man who had chased the buffalo over the prairie, and lassoed the wild horse and the wild bull leaning down from the saddle of his mustang. The day passed off well, and his guests were all content: he alone was not, because a large brown bear which he had sighted and fired at twice had escaped him, and roused that blood-lust in him which is in the hearts of all men.

'Will you come out alone with me to-morrow and try for that grand brute?' he said to Vàsàrhely, as the last of his guests took their departure.

Vàsàrhely hesitated.

'I intended to leave to-morrow; I have been here too long But since you are so good, I will stay twenty-four hours longer.'

He was ashamed in his own heart of the willingness with which he caught at the excuse to remain within sight of his cousin and within watch of Sabran.

'I am charmed,' said his host, in himself regretful that he had suggested a reason for delay; he had not known that the other had intended to leave so soon. They remained together on the terrace giving directions to the *jägermeister* for the next day.

Vàsàrhely looked at his successful rival and said to himself: 'It is impossible. I must be mad to dream it. I am misled by a mere chance resemblance, and even my own memory may have deceived me; I was but a child.'

In the forenoon they both went out into the high hills again,

where the wild creatures had their lairs and were but seldom troubled by a rifle-shot. They brought down some black grouse and hazel grouse and mountain partridges on their upward way. The jägers were scattered in the woods; the day was still and cloudy, a true sportsman's day, with no gleam of sun to shine in their eyes and on the barrels of their rifles. Sabran shooting to the right, Vàsàrhely to the left, they went through the grassy drives that climbed upward and upward, and many a mountain hare was rolled over in their path, and many a ptarmigan and capercailzie. But when they reached the high pine forests where the big game harboured, they ceased to shoot, and advanced silently, waiting and reserving their fire for any large beast the jägers might start and drive towards them from above. In the greyness of the day the upper woods were almost dusky, so thickly stood the cembras and the Siberian pines. There was everywhere the sound of rushing waters, some above, some underground.

'The first beast to you, the second to me,' said Sabran, in a whisper to his companion, who demurred and declared that the first fire should be his host's.

'No,' said Sabran. 'I am at home. Permit me so small a courtesy to my guest.'

Vàsàrhely flushed darkly. In his very politeness this man seemed to him to contrive to sting and wound him.

Sabran, however, who had meant nothing more than he had said, did not observe the displeasure he had caused, and paused at the spot agreed upon with Otto, a grassy spot where four drives met. There they both in absolute silence waited and watched for what the hunter's patron, good S. Hubert, might vouchsafe to send them. They had so waited about a quarter of an hour, when down one of the drives made dusky by the low hanging arolla boughs, there came towards them a great dark beast, and would have gone by them had not Vàsàrhely fired twice as it approached. The bear rolled over, shot through the head and heart.

'Well done!' cried Sabran, but scarcely were the words off his lips when another bear burst through the boughs ahead of him by fifty yards. He levelled his rifle and received its approach with two bullets in rapid succession. But neither had entered a vital part, and the animal, only rendered furious by pain, reared and came towards him with deadliest intent, its great fangs grinning. He fired again, and this shot struck home. The poor brute fell with a crash, the blood pouring from its mouth. It was not dead and its agony was great.

'I will give it the *coup de grâce*,' said Sabran, who, for his wife's sake, was as humane as any hunter ever can be to the beasts he slew.

'Take care,' said Vàsàrhely. 'It is dangerous to touch a wounded bear. I have known one that looked stone dead rise up and kill a man.'

Sabran did not heed. He went up to the poor, panting, groaning mass of fur and flesh, and drew his hunting-knife to give it the only mercy that it was now possible for it to receive. But as he stooped to plunge the knife into its heart the bear verified the warning he had been given. Gathering all its oozing strength in one dying effort to avenge its murder, it leaped on him, dashed him to the earth, and clung to him with claw and tooth fast in his flesh. He freed his right arm from its ponderous weight, its horrible grip, and stabbed it with his knife as it clung to and lacerated him where he lay upon the grass. In an instant, Vàsàrhely and the jäger who was with them were by his side, freed him from the animal, and raised him from the ground. He was deluged with its blood and his own. Vàsàrhely, for one moment of terrible joy, for which he loathed himself afterwards, thought, 'Is he dead?' Men had died of lesser things than this.

He stood erect and smiled, and said that it was nothing, but even as he spoke a faintness came over him, and his lips turned grey.

The jäger supported him tenderly, and would have had him sit down upon a boulder of rock, but he resisted.

'Let me get to that water,' he said feebly, looking to a spot a few yards off, where one of the many torrents of the Hohe Tauern tumbled from the wooded cliff above through birch and beechwood, and rushing underground left a clear round brown pool amongst the ferns. He took a draught from the flask of brandy tendered him by the lad, and leaning on the youth, and struggling against the sinking swoon that was coming on him, walked to the edge of the pool, and dropped down there on one of the mossy stones which served as a rough chair.

'Strip me, and wash the blood away,' he said to the huntsman, whilst the green wood, and the daylight, and the face of the man grew dim to him, and seemed to recede farther and farther in a misty darkness. The youth obeyed, and cut away the velvet coat, the cambric shirt, till he was naked to his waist; then, making sponges of handkerchiefs, the jäger began to wash the blood from him and stanch it as best he could.

Egon Vàsàrhely stood by, without offering any aid; his eyes were fastened on the magnificent bust of Sabran, as the sunlight fell on the fair blue-veined flesh, the firm muscles, the symmetrical throat, the slender, yet sinewy arms, round one of which was clasped a bracelet of fair hair. He had the chance he needed.

He approached and told the lad roughly to leave the Marquis to him, he was doing him more harm than good; he himself had seen many battle-fields, and many men bleeding to death upon their mother earth. By this time Sabran's eyes were closed; he was hardly conscious of anything, a great numbness and infinite exhaustion had fallen upon him; his lips moved feebly. 'Wanda!' he said once or twice, 'Wanda!'

The face of the man who leaned above him grew dark as night; he gnashed his teeth as he begun his errand of mercy.

'Leave me with your lord,' he said to the young jäger. 'Go you to the castle. Find Herr Greswold, bring him; do not alarm the Countess, and say nothing to the household.'

The huntsman went, fleet as a roe. Vàsàrhely remained alone with Sabran, who only heard the sound of the rushing water magnified a million times on his dulled ear.

Vàsàrhely tore the shirt in shreds, and laved and bathed the wounds, and then began to bind them with the skill of a soldier who had often aided his own wounded troopers. But first of all, when he had washed the blood away, he searched with keen and eager eyes for a scar on the white skin—and found it.

On the right shoulder was a small triangular mark; the mark of what, to a soldier's eye, told of an old wound. When he saw it he smiled a cruel smile, and went on with his work of healing.

Sabran leaned against the rock behind him; his eyes were still closed, the pulsations of his heart were irregular. He had lost a great quantity of blood, and the pool at his feet was red. They were but flesh wounds, and there was no danger in them themselves, but great veins had been severed, and the stream of life had hurried forth in torrents. Vàsàrhely thrust the flask between his lips, but he could not swallow.

All had been done that could be for the immediate moment. The stillness of the deep woods was around them; the body of the brown bear lay on the soaked grass; a vulture, scenting death, was circling above against the blue sky. Over the mind of his foe swept at the sight of them one of those hideous temptations which assail the noblest natures in an hour of hatred. If he tore the bandages he had placed there off the rent veins of the unconscious man whom he watched, the blood would leap out again in floods, and so weaken the labouring heart that in ten minutes more its powers would fall so low that all aid would be useless. Never more would the lips of Sabran meet his wife! Never more would his dreams be dreamed upon her breast! For the moment the temptation seemed to curl about him like a flame; he shuddered and crossed himself. Was he a soldier to slay in cold blood by treachery a powerless rival?

He leaned over Sabran again, and again tried to force the mouthpiece of his wine-flask through his teeth. A few drops passed them, and he revived a little, and swallowed a few drops more. The blood was arrested in its escape, and the pulsations of the heart were returning to their normal measure; after a while he unclosed his eyes, and looked up at the green leaves, at the blue sky.

'Do not alarm Wanda,' he said feebly. 'It is a scratch; it will be nothing. Take me home.'

With his left hand he felt for the hair bracelet on his right

arm, between the shoulder and the wrist. It was stiff with his own blood.

Then Vàsàrhely leaned over him and met his upward gaze, and said in his ear, that seemed still filled with the rushing of many waters, 'You are Vassia Kazán!'

When a little later the huntsman returned, bringing the physician, whom he had met a mile nearer the house in the woods, and some peasants bearing a litter made out of pine branches and wood moss, they found Sabran stretched insensible beside the water-pool; and Egon Vàsàrhely, who stood erect beside him, said in a strange tone:

'I have stanched the blood, and he has swooned, you see. I commit him to your hands. I am not needed.'

And, to their surprise, he turned and walked away with swift steps into the green gloom of the dense forest.

CHAPTER XIX.

Sabran was still insensible when he was carried to the house.

When he regained consciousness he was on his own bed, and his wife was bending over him. A convulsion of grief crossed his face as he lifted his eyelids and looked at her.

'Wanda,' he murmured feebly, 'Wanda, you will forgive——'

She kissed him passionately, while her tears fell like rain upon his forehead. She did not hear his words distinctly; she was only alive to the intense joy of his recovered consciousness, of the sound of his voice, of the sense of his safety. She kneeled by his bed, covering his hands with caresses, prodigal of a thousand names of love, given up to an abandonment of terror and of hope which broke down all the serenity and self-command of her habitual temper. She was not even aware of the presence of others. The over-mastering emotions of anguish and of joy filled her soul, and made her seem deaf, indifferent to all living things save one.

Sabran lay motionless. He felt her lips, he heard her voice; he did not look up again, nor did he speak again. He shut his eyes, and slowly remembered all that had passed. Greswold approached him and held his fingers on his wrist, and held a little glass to his mouth. Sabran put it away. 'It is an opiate,' he said feebly; 'I will not have it.'

He was resolute; he closed his teeth, he thrust the calming draught away.

He was thinking to himself: 'Sometimes in unconsciousness one speaks.'

'You are not in great pain?' asked the physician. He made a negative movement of his head. What were the fire and the smart of his lacerated flesh, of his torn muscles, to the torments of his fears, to the agony of his long stifled conscience?

'Do not torment him, let him be still,' she said to the physician; she held his hand in both her own and pressed it to her heart. His languid eyes thanked her, then closed again.

Herr Greswold withdrew to a little distance and waited. It seemed to him strange that a man of the high courage and strong constitution of Sabran should be thus utterly broken down by any wound that was not mortal; should be thus sunk into dejection and apathy, making no effort to raise himself, even to console and reassure his wife. It was not like his careless and gallant temper, his virile and healthful strength.

It was true, the doctor reflected, that he had lost a great amount of blood. Such a loss he knew sometimes affects the heart and shatters the nervous system in many unlooked-for ways. Yet, he thought, there was something beyond this; the attitude and the regard of Egon Vàsàrhely had been unnatural at such an hour of peril. 'When he said just now "forgive," what did he mean?' reflected the old man, whose ear had caught the word which had escaped that of Wanda, who had been only alive to the voice she adored.

The next four days were anxious and terrible. Sabran did not recover as the physician expected that he would, seeing the nature of his wounds and the naturally elastic and sanguine temperament he possessed. He slept little, had considerable fever, woke from the little rest he had, startled, alarmed, bathed in cold sweats; at other times he lay still in an apathy almost comatose, from which all the caresses and entreaties of his wife failed to rouse him. They began to fear that the discharge from the arteries had in some subtle and dangerous manner affected the action of the heart, the composition of the blood, and produced aneurism or pyæmia. 'The hero of Idrac to be prostrated by a mere flesh wound!' thought Herr Greswold in sore perplexity. He sent for a great man of science from Vienna, who, when he came, declared the treatment admirable, the wounds healthy, the heart in a normal state, but added it was evident the nervous system had received a severe shock, the effects of which still remained.

'But it is that which I cannot understand,' said the old man in despair. 'If you only knew the Marquis de Sabran as I know him; the most courageous, the most gay, the most resolute of men! A man to laugh at death in its face! A man absolutely without fear!'

The other assented.

'Every one knows what he did in the floods of Idrac,' he answered; 'but he has a sensitive temperament for all that. If you did not tell me it is impossible, I should say that he had had

some mental shock, some great grief. The prostration seems to me more of the mind than the body. But you have assured me it is impossible?'

'Impossible! There does not live on earth a man so happy, so fortunate, so blessed in all the world as he.'

'Men have a past that troubles them sometimes,' said the Vienna physician. 'Nay, I mean nothing, but I believe that M. de Sabran was a man of pleasure. The cup of pleasure sometimes has dregs that one must drink long afterwards. I do not mean anything; I merely suggest. The prostration has to my view its most probable origin in mental trouble; but it would do him more harm than good to excite him by any effort to certify this. To the Countess von Szalras I have merely said that his state is the result of the large loss of blood, and, indeed, after all it may be so.'

On the fifth day, Sabran still lying in that almost comatose silence which had been scarcely broken since his accident, said in a scarce audible voice to his wife:

'Is your cousin here?'

She stooped towards him and answered:

'Yes; he is here, love. All the others went immediately, but Egon remained. I suppose he thought it looked kinder to do so. I have scarcely seen him, of course.'

The pallor of his face grew greyer; he turned his head away restlessly.

'Why does he not go?' he muttered in his throat. 'Does he wait for my death?'

'Oh, René! hush, hush!' she said, with horror and amaze. 'My love, how can you say such things? You are in no danger; the doctor assures me so. In a week or two you will be well, you will be yourself.'

'Send your cousin away.'

She hesitated; troubled by his unreasoning, restless jealousy, which seemed to be the only consciousness of life remaining with him. 'I will obey you, love; you are lord here,' she said softly; 'but will it not look strange? No guest can well be told to go.'

'A guest!—he is an enemy!'

She sighed, knowing how hopelessly reason can struggle against the delusions of a sick bed. 'I will tell him to go to-morrow,' she said, to soothe him. 'To-night it is too late.'

'Write to him—do not leave me.'

There was a childlike appeal in his voice, that from a man so strong had a piteous pathos.

Her eyes swam with tears as she heard.

'Oh, my dearest, I will not leave you!' she said, passionately, 'not for one moment whilst I live; and oh, my beloved! what could death ever change in *me*? Have you so little faith?'

'You do not know,' he said, so low that his breath scarcely stirred the air.

She thought that he was tormented by a doubt that she would not be faithful to him if he died. She stooped and kissed him.

'My own, I would sooner be faithless to you in your life than after death. Surely you know me well enough to know that at the least?'

He was silent. A great sigh struggled from his breast and escaped his pale lips like a parting breath.

'Kiss me again,' he murmured; 'kiss me again, whilst—— That gives me life,' he said, as he drew her head down upon his bosom, where his heart throbbed labouredly. A little while later he fell asleep. He slept some hours. When he awoke he was consumed by a nameless fear.

'Is your cousin gone?' he asked.

She told him that it was one o'clock in the same night; she had not written yet.

'Let him stay,' he said, feverishly. 'He shall not think I fear him. Do you hear me? Let him stay.'

The words seemed to her the causeless caprice of a jealousy magnified and distorted by the weakness of fever. She strove to answer him calmly. 'He shall go or stay as you please,' she assured him. 'What does it matter, dear, what Egon does? You always speak of Egon. You have never spoken of the children once.'

She wanted to distract his thoughts. She was pained to think how deep, though unspoken, his antagonism to her cousin must have been, that now in his feebleness it was the one paramount absorbing thought.

A great sadness came upon his face as she spoke; his lips trembled a little.

'Ah! the children,' he repeated. 'Yes, bring them to me to-morrow. Bela is too like me. Poor Bela, it will be his curse.'

'It is my joy of joys,' she murmured, afraid to see how his mind seemed astray.

A shudder that was almost a spasm passed over him. He did not reply. He turned his face away from her, and seemed to sleep.

The day following he was somewhat calmer, somewhat stronger, though his fever was high.

The species of paralysis that had seemed to fall on all his faculties had in a great measure left him. 'You wish me to recover,' he said to her. 'I will do so, though perhaps it were better not.'

'He says strange things,' she said to Greswold. 'I cannot think why he has such thoughts.'

'It is not he, himself, that has them, it is his fever,' answered

the doctor. 'Why, in fever, do people often hate what they most adore when they are in health?'

She was reassured, but not contented.

The children were brought to see him. Bela had with him an ivory air-gun, with which he was accustomed to blow down his metal soldiers; he looked at his father with awed, dilated eyes, and said that he would go out with the gun and kill the brothers of the bear that had done the harm.

'The bear was quite right,' said Sabran. 'It was I who was wrong to take a life not my own.'

'That is beyond Bela,' said his wife. 'But I will translate it to him into language he shall understand, though I fear very much, say what I will, he will be a hunter and a soldier one day.'

Bela looked from one to the other, knitting his fair brows as he sat on the edge of the bed.

'Bela will be like Egon,' he said, 'with all gold and fur to dress up in, and a big jewelled sword, and ten hundred men and horses, and Bela will be a great killer of things!'

Sabran smiled languidly, but she saw that he flinched at her cousin's name.

'I shall not love you, Bela, if you are a killer of things that are God's dear creatures,' she said, as she sent the child away.

His blue eyes grew dark with anger.

'God only cares about Bela,' he said in innocent profanity, with a profound sense of his own vastness in the sight of Heaven, 'and Gela,' he added, with the condescending tenderness wherewith he always associated his brother and himself.

'Where could he get all that overwhelming pride?' she said, as he was led away. 'I have tried to rear him so simply. Do what I may he will grow arrogant and selfish.'

'My dear,' said Sabran, very bitterly, 'what avails that he was borne in your bosom? He is my son!'

'Gela is your son, and he is so different,' she answered, not seeking to combat the self-censure to which she was accustomed in him, and which she attributed to faults or follies of a past life, magnified by a conscience too sensitive.

'He is all yours then,' he said, with a wan smile. 'You have prevailed over evil.'

In a few days later his recovery had progressed so far that he had regained his usual tone and look; his wounds were healing, and his strength was returning. He seemed to the keen eyes of Greswold to have made a supreme effort to conquer the moral depression into which he had sunk, and to have thrust away his malady almost by force of will. As he grew better he never spoke of Egon Và-àrhely.

On the fifteenth day from his accident he was restored enough to health for apprehension to cease. He passed some hours seated

at an open window in his own room. He never asked if Vàsàrhely were still there or not.

Wanda, who never left him, wondered at that silence, but she forbore to bring forward a name which had had such power to agitate him. She was troubled at the nervousness which still remained to him. The opening of a door, the sound of a step, the entrance of a servant made him start and turn pale. When she spoke of it with anxiety to Herr Joachim, he said vague sentences as to the nervousness which was consequent on great loss of blood, and brought forward instances of soldiers who had lost their nerve from the same cause. It did not satisfy her. She was the descendant of a long line of warriors; she could not easily believe that her husband's intrepid and careless courage could have been shattered by a flesh wound.

'Did you really mean,' he said abruptly to her that afternoon, as he sat for the first time beside the open panes of the oriel; 'did you really mean that were I to die you would never forget me for any other?'

She rose quickly as if she had been stung, and her face flushed.

'Do I merit that doubt from you?' she said. 'I think not.'

She spoke rather in sadness than in anger. He had hurt her, he could not anger her. He felt the rebuke.

'Even if I were dead, should I have all your life?' he murmured, in wonder at that priceless gift.

'You and your children,' she said, gravely. 'Ah! what can death do against great love? Make its bands stronger perhaps, its power purer. Nothing else.'

'I thank you,' he said very low, with great humility, with intense emotion. For a moment he thought—should he tell her, should he trust this deep tenderness which could brave death, and might brave even shame unblenching? He looked at her from under his drooped eyelids, and then—he dared not. He knew the pride which was in her better than she did—her pride, which was inherited by her first-born, and had been the sign manual of all her imperious race.

He looked at her where she stood with the light falling on her through the amber hues of painted glass; worn, wan, and tired by so many days and nights of anxious vigil, she yet looked a woman whom a nation might salute with the *pro rege nostro*! that Maria Theresa heard. All that a great race possesses and rejoices in of valour, of tradition, of dignity, of high honour, and of blameless truth were expressed in her; every movement, attitude, and gesture spoke of the aristocracy of blood. All that potent and subtle sense of patrician descent which had most allured and intoxicated him in other days now awed and daunted him. He dared not tell her of his treason. He dared not. He was as a false conspirator before a great queen he has betrayed.

'Are you faint, my love?' she asked him, alarmed to see the change upon his face and the exhaustion with which he sunk backward against the cushions of his chair.

'Mere weakness; it will pass,' he said, smiling as best he might, to reassure her. He felt like a man who slides down a crevasse, and has time and consciousness enough to see the treacherous ice go by him, the black abyss yawning below him, the cold, dark death awaiting him beyond, whilst on the heights the sun is shining.

That night he entreated her to leave him and rest. He assured her he felt well; he feigned a need of sleep. For fifteen nights she had not herself lain down. To please him she obeyed, and the deep slumber of tired nature soon fell upon her. When he thought she slept, he rose noiselessly and threw on a long velvet coat, sable-lined, that was by his bedside, and looked at his watch. It was midnight.

He crossed the threshold of the open door into his wife's chamber and stood beside her bed for a moment, gazing at her as she slept. She seemed like the marble statue of some sleeping saint; she lay in the attitude of S. Cecilia on her bier at Rome. The faint lamplight made her fair skin white as snow. Round her arm was a bracelet of his hair like the one which he wore of hers. He stood and gazed on her, then slowly turned away. Great tears fell down his cheeks as he left her chamber. He opened the door of his own room, the outer one which led into the corridor, and walked down the long tapestry-hung gallery leading to the guest-chambers. It was the first time that he had walked without assistance; his limbs felt strange and broken, but he held on, leaning now and then to rest against the arras. The whole house was still.

He took his way straight to the apartments set aside for guests. All was dark. The little lamp he carried shed a circle of light about his steps but none beyond him. When he reached the chamber which he knew was Egon Vàsàrhely's he did not pause. He struck on its panels with a firm hand.

The voice of Vàsàrhely asked from within, 'Who is there? Is there anything wrong?'

'It is I! Open,' answered Sabran.

In a moment more the door unclosed. Vàsàrhely stood within it; he was not undressed. There were a dozen wax candles burning in silver sconces on the table within. The tapestried figures on the walls grew pale and colossal in their light. He did not speak, but waited.

Sabran entered and closed the door behind him. His face was bloodless, but he carried himself erect despite the sense of faintness which assailed him.

'You know who I am?' he said simply, without preface or supplication.

Vàsàrhely gave a gesture of assent.

'How did you know it?'

'I remembered,' answered the other.

There was a moment's silence. If Vàsàrhely could have withered to the earth by a gaze of scorn the man before him, Sabran would have fallen dead. As it was, his eyes drooped beneath the look, but the courage and the dignity of his attitude did not alter. He had played his part of a great noble for so long that it had ceased to be assumption and had become his nature.

'You will tell her?' he said, and his voice did not tremble, though his very soul seemed to swoon within him.

'I shall not tell her!'

Vàsàrhely spoke with effort; his words were hoarse and stern.

'You will not?'

An immense joy, unlooked for, undreamed of, sprang up in him, checked as it rose by incredulity.

'But you loved her!' he said, on an impulse which he regretted even as the exclamation escaped him. Vàsàrhely threw his head back with a gesture of fine anger.

'If I loved her what is that to you?' he said, with a restrained violence vibrating in his words. 'It is, perhaps, because I once loved her that your foul secret is safe with me now. I shall not tell her. I waited to say this to you. I could not write it lest it should meet her eyes. You came to ask me this? Be satisfied and go.'

'I came to ask you this because, had you said otherwise, I would have shot myself ere she could have heard.'

Vàsàrhely said nothing; a great scorn was still set like the grimness of death upon his face. He looked far away at the dim figures on the tapestries; he shrunk from the sight of his boyhood's enemy as from some loathly unclean thing he must not kill.

'Suicide!' he thought, 'the Slav's courage, the serf's refuge!'

Before the sight of Sabran the room went round, the lights grew dull, the figures on the walls became fantastic and unreal. His heart beat with painful effort, yet his ears, his throat, his brain seemed full of blood. The nerves of his whole body seemed to shrink and thrill and quiver, but the force of habit kept him composed and erect before this man who was his foe, yet did for him what few friends would have done.

'I do not thank you,' he said at last. 'I understand; you spare me for her sake, not mine.'

'But for her, I would not treat you so.'

As he spoke he broke in two a slender agate ruler which lay on the writing-table at his elbow.

'Go,' he added, 'you have had my word; though we live fifty

years you are safe from me, because—because—God forgive you! you are hers.'

He made a gesture towards the door. Sabran shivered under the insult which his conscience could not resent, his hand dared not avenge.

Hearing this there fell away from him the arrogance that had been his mask, the courage that had been his shield. He saw himself for the first time as this man saw him, as all the world would see him if once it knew his secret. For the first time his past offences rose up like ghosts naked from their graves. The calmness, the indifference, the cynicism, the pride which had been so long in his manner and in his nature deserted him. He felt base-born before a noble, a liar before a gentleman, a coward before a man of honour.

Where he stood, leaning on a high caned chair to support himself against the sickly weakness which still came on him from his scarce healed wounds, he felt for the first time to cower and shrink before this man who was his judge, and might become his accuser did he choose. Something in the last words of Egon Vàsàrhely suddenly brought home to him the enormity of his own sin, the immensity of the other's forbearance. He suddenly realised all the offence to honour, all the outrage to pride, all the ineffaceable indignity which he had brought upon a great race: all that he had done, never to be undone by any expiation of his own, in making Wanda von Szalras the mother of his sons. Submissive, he turned without a word of gesture or of pleading, and felt his way out of the chamber through the dusky mists of the faintness stealing on him.

CHAPTER XX.

He reached his own room unseen, feeling his way with his hands against the tapestry of the wall, and had presence of mind enough to fling his clothes off him and stagger to his bed, where he sank down insensible.

She was still asleep.

When dawn broke they found him ill, exhausted, with a return of fever. He had once a fit of weeping like a child. He could not bear his wife a moment from his sight. She reproached herself for having acceded to his desire and left him unattended whilst she slept.

But of that midnight interview she guessed nothing.

Her cousin Egon sent her a few lines, saying that he had been summoned to represent his monarch at the autumn manœuvres of Prussia, and had left at daybreak without being able to make his

farewell in person, as he had previously to go to his castle of Taróc. She attached no importance to it. When Sabran was told of his departure he said nothing. He had recovered his power of self-control: the Oriental impassability under emotion which was in his blood from his Persian mother. If he betrayed himself he knew that it would be of little use to have been spared by his enemy. The depression upon him his wife attributed to his incapacity to move and lead his usual life; a trial always so heavy to a strong man. As little by little his strength returned, he became more like himself. In addressing her he had a gentleness almost timid; and now and then she caught his gaze fastened upon her with a strange appeal.

One day, when he had persuaded her to ride in the forest, and he was certain to be alone for two or three hours, he wrote the following words to his foe and his judge:

'Sir,—You will perhaps refuse to read anything written by me. Yet I send you this letter, because I desire to say to you what the physical weakness which was upon me the other night prevented my having time or strength to explain. I desire also to put in your hands a proof absolute against myself, with which you can do as you please, so that the forbearance which you exercised, if it be your pleasure to continue it, shall not be surprised from you by any momentary generosity, but shall be your deliberate choice and decision. I have another course of action to propose to you, to which I will come later. For the present permit me to give you the outline of all the circumstances which have governed my acts. I am not coward enough to throw the blame on fate or chance; I am well aware that good men and great men combat and govern both. Yet, something of course there lies in these, or, if not, excuse at least explanation. You knew me (when you were a boy) as Vassia Kazán, the natural son of the Prince Paul Ivanovitch Zabaroff. Up to nine years old I dwelt with my grandmother, a Persian woman, on the great plain between the Volga water and the Ural range. Thence I was taken to the Lycée Clovis, a famous college. Prince Zabaroff I never saw but one day in my Volga village, until, when I was fifteen years old, I was sent to his house, Fleur de Roi, near Villerville, where I remained two months, and where you insulted me and I chastised you, and you gave me the wound that I have the mark of to this day. I then returned to the Lycée, and stayed there two years unnoticed by him. One day I was summoned by the principal, and told abruptly that the Prince Zabaroff was dead —my protector, as they termed him—and that I was penniless, with the world before me. I could not hope to make you understand the passions that raged in me. You, who have always been in the light of fortune, and always the head of a mighty family, could comprehend nothing of the sombre hatreds, the futile revolts, the bitter wrath against heaven and humanity which con-

sumed me then, thus left alone without even the remembrance of a word from my father. I should have returned straightway to the Volga plains, and buried my fevered griefs under their snows, had not I known that my grandmother Maritza, the only living being I had ever loved, had died half a year after I had been taken from her to be sent to the school in Paris. You see, had I been left there I should have been a hunter of wild things or a raftsman on the Volga all my years, and have done no harm. I had a great passion in my childhood for an open-air, free life; my vices, like my artificial tastes, were all learned in Paris. They, and the love of pleasure they created, checked in me that socialistic spirit which is the usual outcome of such a social anomaly as they had made of me. I might have been a Nihilist but for that and for the instinctive tendency towards aristocratic and absolutist theories which were in my blood. I was a true Russian noble, though a bastard one; and those three months which I had passed at Fleur de Roi had intoxicated me with the thirst for pleasure and enervated me with the longing to be rich and idle. An actress whom I knew intimately also at that time did me much harm. When Paul Zabaroff died he left me nothing, not even a word. It is true that he died suddenly. I quitted the Lycée Clovis with my clothes and my books; I had nothing else in the world. I sold some of these and got to Havre. There I took a passage on a barque going to Mexico with wine. The craft was unseaworthy; she went down with all hands off the Pinos Island, and I, swimming for miles, alone reached the shore. Women there were good to me. I got away in a canoe, and rowed many miles and many days; the sea was calm, and I had bread, fruit, and water enough to last two weeks. At the end of ten days I neared a brig, which took me to Yucatan. My adventurous voyage made me popular there. I gave a false name, of course, for I hated the name of Vassia Kazán. War was going on at the time in Mexico, and I went there and offered myself to the military adventurer who was at the moment uppermost. I saw a good deal of guerilla warfare for a year. I liked it; I fear I was cruel. The ruler of the hour, who was scarcely more than a brigand, was defeated and assassinated. At the time of his fall I was at the head of a few troopers far away in the interior. Bands of Indians fell on us in great numbers. I was shot down and left for dead. A stranger found me on the morning after, carried me to his hut, and saved my life by his skill and care. This stranger was the Marquis Xavier de Sabran, who had dwelt for nearly seventy years in the solitude of those virgin forests, which nothing ever disturbed except the hiss of an Indian's arrow or the roar of woods on fire. How he lived there, and why, is all told in the monograph I have published of him. He was a great and a good man. His life, lost under the shadows of those virgin forests, was the life of a saint and of a philosopher in one. His influence upon

me was the noblest that I had ever been subject to; he did me nothing but good. His son had died early, having wedded a Spanish Mexican ere he was twenty. His grandson had died of snake-bite: he had been of my age. At times he almost seemed to think that this lad lived again in me. I spent eight years of my life with him. His profound studies attracted me; his vast learning awed me. The free life of the woods and sierras, the perilous sports, the dangers from the Indian tribes, the researches into the lost history of the perished nation, all these interested and occupied me. I was glad to forget that I had ever lived another existence. Wholly unlike as it was in climate, in scenery, in custom, the liberty of life on the pampas and in the forests recalled to me my childhood on the steppes of the Volga. I saw no European all those years. The only men I came in contact with were Indians and half breeds; the only woman I loved was an Indian girl; there was not even a Mexican *ranch* near, within hundreds of miles. The dense close-woven forest was between us and the rest of the world; our only highway was a river, made almost inaccessible by dense fields of reeds and banks of jungle and swamps covered with huge lilies. It was a very simple existence, but in it all the wants of nature were satisfied, all healthy desires could be gratified, and it was elevated from brutishness by the lofty studies which I prosecuted under the direction of the Marquis Xavier. Eight whole years passed so. I was twenty-five years old when my protector and friend died of sheer old age in one burning summer, against whose heat he had no strength. He talked long and tenderly with me ere he died; told me where to find all his papers, and gave me everything he owned. It was not much. He made me one last request, that I would collect his manuscripts, complete them, and publish them in France. For some weeks after his death I could think of nothing but his loss. I buried him myself, with the aid of an Indian who had loved him; and his grave is there beside the ruins that he revered, beneath a grove of cypress. I carved a cross in cedar wood, and raised it above the grave. I found all his papers where he had indicated, underneath one of the temple porticoes; his manuscripts I had already in my possession: all those which had been brought with him from France by his Jesuit tutors, and the certificates of his own and his father's births and marriages, with those of his son, and of his grandson. There was also a paper containing directions how to find other documents, with the orders and patents of nobility of the Sabrans of Romaris, which had been hidden in the oak wood upon their sea-shore in Finisterre. All these he had desired me to seek and take. Now came upon me the temptation to a great sin. The age of his grandson, the young Réné de Sabran, had been mine: he also had perished from snake-bite, as I said, without any human being knowing of it save his grandfather and a few natives. It

seemed to me that if I assumed his name I should do no one any wrong. It boots not to dwell on the sophisms with which I persuaded myself that I had the right to repair an injustice done to me by human law ere I was born. Men less intelligent than I can always find a million plausible reasons for doing that which they desire to do; and although the years I had spent beside the Marquis Xavier had purified my character and purged it of much of the vice and the cynicism I had learned in Paris, yet I had little moral conscientiousness. I lived outside the law in many ways, and was indifferent to those measures of right and wrong which too often appeared to me mere puerilities. Do not suppose that I ceased to be grateful to my benefactor; I adored his memory, but it seemed to me I should do him no wrong whatever. Again and again he had deplored to me that I was not his heir; he had loved me very truly, and had given me all he held most dear—the fruits of his researches. To be brief, I was sorely tempted, and I gave way to the temptation. I had no difficulty in claiming recognition in the city of Mexico as the Marquis de Sabran. The documents were there, and no creature knew that they were not mine except a few wild Puebla Indians, who spoke no tongue but their own, and never left their forest solitudes. I was recognised by all the necessary authorities of that country. I returned to France as the Marquis de Sabran. On my voyage I made acquaintance with two Frenchmen of very high station, who proved true friends to me, and had power enough to protect me from the consequences of not having served a military term in France. On my arrival in Europe, I went first to the Bay of Romaris: there I found at once all that had been indicated to me as hidden in the oak wood above the sea. The priest of Romaris, and the peasantry, at the first utterance of the name, welcomed me with rapture; they had forgotten nothing—Bretons never do forget. Vassia Kazán had been numbered with the drowned dead men who had gone down when the "Estelle" had foundered off the Pinos. I had therefore no fear of recognition. I had grown and changed so much during my seven years' absence from Paris that I did not suppose any one would recognise the Russian collegian in the Marquis de Sabran. And I was not in error. Even you, most probably, would never have known me again had not your perceptions been abnormally quickened by hatred of me as your cousin's husband; and had you even had suspicions you could never have presumed to formulate them but for that accident in the forest. It is always some such unforeseen trifle which breaks down the wariest schemes. I will not linger on all the causes that made me take the name I did. I can honestly say that had there been any fortune involved, or any even distant heir to be wronged, I should not have done it. As there was nothing save some insignia of knightly orders and some acres of utterly unproductive sea-coast, I wronged no one. What was left of the

old manor I purchased with the little money I took over with me. I repeat that I have wronged no one except your cousin, who is my wife. The rest of my life you know. Society in Paris became gracious and cordial to me. You will say that I must have had every moral sense perverted before I could take such a course. But I did not regard it as an immorality. Here was an empty title, like an empty shell, lying ready for any occupant. Its usurpation harmed no one. I intended to justify my assumption of it by a distinguished career, and I was aware that my education had been beyond that of most gentlemen. It is true that when I was fairly launched on a Parisian life pleasure governed me more than ambition; and I found, which had not before occurred to me, that the aristocratic creeds and the political loyalties which I had perforce adopted with the name of the Sabrans de Romaris completely closed all the portals of political ambition to me. Hence I became almost by necessity a *fainéant*, and fate smiled upon me more than I merited. I discharged my duty to the dead by the publication of all his manuscripts. In this at least I was faithful. Paris applauded me. I became in a manner celebrated. I need not say more, except that I can declare to you the position I had entered upon soon became so natural to me that I absolutely forgot it was assumed. Nature had made me arrogant, contemptuous, courageous; it was quite natural to me to act the part of a great noble. My want of fortune often hampered and irritated me, but I had that instinct in public events which we call *flair*. I made with slender means some audacious and happy ventures on the Bourse. I was also famous for *la main heureuse* in all forms of gambling. I led a selfish and perhaps even a vicious life, but I kept always within those lines which the usages of the world have prescribed to gentlemen even in their licence. I never did anything that degraded the name I had taken, as men of the world read degradation. I should not have satisfied severe moralists, but, my one crime apart, I was a man of honour until—I loved your cousin. I do not attempt to defend my marriage with her. It was a fraud, a crime; I am well aware of that. If you had struck me the other night, I would not have denied your perfect right to do so. I will say no more. You have loved her. You know what my temptation was: my crime is one you cannot pardon. It is a treason to your rank, to your relatives, to all the traditions of your order. When you were a little lad you said a bitter truth to me. I was born a serf in Russia. There are serfs no more in Russia, but Alexander, who affranchised them, cannot affranchise me. I am base-born. I am like those cross-bred hounds cursed by conflicting elements in their blood: I am an aristocrat in temper and in taste and mind. I am a bastard in class, the chance child of a peasant begotten by a great lord's momentary *ennui* and caprice! But if you will stoop so far—if you will consider me ennobled by *her* enough to meet you as an

equal would do—we can find with facility some pretext of quarrel, and under cover and semblance of a duel you can kill me. You will be only taking the just vengeance of a race of which you are the only male champion—what her brothers would surely have taken had they been living. She will mourn for me without shame, since you have passed me your promise never to tell her of my past. I await your commands. That my little sons will transmit the infamy of my blood to their descendants will be disgrace to them for ever in your sight. Yet you will not utterly hate them, for children are more their mother's than their father's, and she will rear them in all noble ways.'

Then he signed the letter with the name of Vassia Kazán, and addressed it to Egon Vàsàrhely at his castle of Taróc, there to await the return of Vàsàrhely from the Prussian camp. That done, he felt more at peace with himself, more nearly a gentleman, less heavily weighted with his own cowardice and shame.

It was not until three weeks later that he received the reply of Vàsàrhely written from the castle of Taróc. It was very brief:—

'I have read your letter and I have burned it. I cannot kill you, for she would never pardon me. Live on in such peace as you may find.

(Signed) 'PRINCE VÀSÀRHELY.'

To his cousin Vàsàrhely wrote at the same time, and to her said:

'Forgive me that I left you so abruptly. It was necessary, and I did not rebel against necessity, for so I avoided some pain. The world has seen me at Hohenszalras; let that suffice. Do not ask me to return. It hurts me to refuse you anything, but residence there is only a prolonged suffering to me and must cause irritation to your lord. I go to my soldiers in Central Hungary, amongst whom I make my family. If ever you need me you will know that I am at your service; but I hope this will never be, since it will mean that some evil has befallen you. Rear your sons in the traditions of your race, and teach them to be worthy of yourself: being so they will be also worthy of your name. Adieu, my ever beloved Wanda! Show what I have said herein to your husband, and give me a remembrance in your prayers.

(Signed) 'EGON.'

CHAPTER XXI.

THE Countess Brancka meanwhile had been staying at Taróc for the autumn shooting when her brother-in-law had returned there unexpectedly, and to her chagrin, since she had filled the old castle with friends of her own, such as Egon Vàsàrhely little favoured, and it amused her to play the châtelaine there and organise all manner of extravagant and eccentric pastimes. When he arrived she could no longer enjoy this unchecked independence of folly, and he did not hesitate to make it plain to her that the sooner Taróc should be cleared of its Parisian world the better would he be pleased. Indeed she knew well that it was only his sense of hospitality, as the first duty of a gentleman, which restrained him from enforcing a rough and sudden exodus upon her guests. He returned, moreover, unusually silent, reserved, and what she termed ill-tempered. It was clear to her that his sojourn at Hohenszalras had been painful to him; and whenever she spoke to him of it he replied to her in a tone which forbade her further interrogation. If she feared any one in the world it was Egon, who had again and again paid her debts to spare his brother annoyance, and who received her and her caprices with a contemptuous unalterable disdain.

'Wanda has ruined him!' she always thought angrily. 'He always expects every other woman to have a soul above *chiffons* and to bury herself in the country with children and horses.'

Her quick instincts perceived that the hold upon his thoughts which his cousin always possessed had been only strengthened by his visit to her, and she attributed the gloom which had settled down on him to the pain which the happiness that reigned at Hohenszalras had given him. Little souls always try to cram great ones into their own narrowed measurements. As he did not absolutely dismiss her she continued to entertain her own people at Taróc, ignoring his tacit disapproval, and was still there when the letter of Sabran reached her brother-in-law. She had very quick eyes; she was present when the letters, which only came to Taróc once a week, being fetched over many leagues of wild forest, and hill, and torrent, and ravine, were brought to Vàsàrhely, and she noticed that his face changed as he took out a thick envelope, which she, standing by his shoulder, with her hand outstretched for her own correspondence from Paris and Petersburg, could see bore the postmark of Matrey. He threw it amongst a mass of other letters, and soon after took all his papers away with him into the room which was called a library, being full of Hungarian black-letter and monkish literature, gathered in centuries gone by by great priests of the race of Vàsàrhely.

What was in that letter?

She attended to none of her own, so absorbed was she in the impression which gained upon her that the packet which had brought so much surprise and even emotion upon his face came from the hand of Wanda. 'If even she should be no saint at all?' she thought, with a malicious amusement. She did not see Egon Vàsàrhely for many hours, but she did not lose her curiosity nor cease to cast about for a method of gratifying it. At the close of the day when she came back from hunting she went into the library, which was then empty. She did not seriously expect to see anything that would reward her enterprise, but she knew he read his letters there and wrote the few he was obliged to write: like most soldiers he disliked using pen and ink. It was dusk, and there were a few lights burning in the old silver sconces fixed upon the horns of forest animals against the walls. With a quick, calm touch, she moved all the litter of papers lying on the huge table where he was wont to do such business as he was compelled to transact. She found nothing that gratified her inquisitiveness. She was about to leave the room in baffled impatience—impatience of she knew not what—when her eyes fell upon a pile of charred paper lying on the stove.

It was one of those monumental polychrome stoves of fifteenth-century work in which the country-houses of Central Europe are so rich; a grand pile of fretted pottery, towering half way to the ceiling, with the crown and arms of the Vàsàrhely princes on its summit. There was no fire in it, for the weather was not cold, and Vàsàrhely, who alone used the room, was an ascetic in such matters; but upon its jutting step, which was guarded by lions of gilded bronze, there had been some paper burned: the ashes lay there in a little heap. Almost all of it was ash, but a few torn pieces were only blackened and coloured. With the eager curiosity of a woman who is longing to find another woman at fault, she kneeled down by the stove and patiently examined these pieces. Only one was so little burned that it had a word or two legible upon it; two of those words were Vassia Kazán. Nothing else was traceable; she recognised the handwriting of Sabran. She attached no importance to it, yet she slipped the little scrap, burnt and black as it was, within one of her gauntlets; then, as quickly as she had come there, she retreated, and in another half hour, smiling and radiant, covered with jewels, and with no trace of fatigue or of weather, she descended the great banqueting-hall, clad as though the heart of the Greater Karpathians was the centre of the Boulevard S. Germain.

Who was Vassia Kazán?

The question floated above all her thoughts all that evening. Who was he, she, or it, and what could Sabran have to say of him, or her, or it to Egon Vàsàrhely? A less wise woman might have asked straightway what the unknown name might mean, but

straight ways are not those which commend themselves to temperaments like hers. The pleasure and the purpose of her life was intrigue. In great things she deemed it necessity; in trifles it was an amusement; without it life was flavourless.

The next day her brother-in-law abandoned Taróc, to join his hussars and prepare for the autumn manœuvres in the plains, and left her and Stefan in possession of the great place, half palace, half fortress, which had withstood more than one siege of Ottoman armies, where it stood across a deep gorge with the water foaming black below. But she kept the charred, torn, triangular scrap of paper; and she treasured in her memory the two words Vassia Kazán; and she said again and again and again to herself: 'Why should he write to Egon? Why should Egon burn what he writes?' Deep down in her mind there was always at work a bitter jealousy of Wanda von Szalras; jealousy of her regular and perfect beauty, of her vast possessions, of her influence at the Court, of her serene and unspotted repute, and now of her ascendency over the lives of Sabran and of Vàsàrhely.

'Why should they both love that woman so much?' she thought very often. 'She is always alike. She has no temptations. She goes over life as if it were frozen snow. She did one senseless thing, but then she was rich enough to do it with impunity. She is so habitually fortunate that she is utterly uninteresting; and yet they are both her slaves!'

She went home and wrote to a cousin of her own who had been a member of the famous Third Section at Petersburg. She said in her letter: 'Is there any one known in Russia as Vassia Kazán? I want you to learn for me to what or to whom this name belongs. It is certainly Russian, and appears to me to have been taken by some one who has been named *more hebræo* from the city of Kazán. You, who know everything past, present, and to come, will be able to know this.'

In a few days she received an answer from Petersburg. Her cousin wrote: 'I cannot give you the information you desire. It must be a thing of the past. But I will keep it in mind, and sooner or later you shall have the knowledge you wish. You will do us the justice to admit that we are not easily baffled.'

She was not satisfied, but knew how to be patient.

CHAPTER XXII.

Strangely enough the consciousness that one person lived who knew his secret unnerved Sabran. He had said truly that so much were all his instincts and temper those of an aristocrat that he had long ceased to remember that he was not the true Marquis de

Sabran. The admiration men frankly gave him, and the ascendency he exercised over women, had alike concurred in fostering his self-delusion. Since his recognition by the foe of his boyhood a vivid sense of his own shamefulness, however, had come upon him; a morbid consciousness that he was not what he seemed, and what all the world believed him, had returned to him. Egon would never speak, but he himself could never forget. He said to himself in his solitude, 'I am Vassia Kazán!' and what he had done appeared to him intolerable, infamous, beyond all expiation.

It was like an impalpable but impassable wall built up between himself and her. Nothing was changed except that one man knew his secret, but this one fact seemed to change the face of the world. For the first time all the deference, all the homage with which the people of the Tauern treated him seemed to him a derision. Naturally of proud temper, and of an intellect which gave him ascendency over others, he had from the first moment he had assumed the marquisate of Sabran received all the acknowledgments of his rank with an honest unconsciousness of imposture. After all he had in his veins blood as patrician as that of the Sabrans; but now that Egon Vàsàrhely knew the truth he was perpetually conscious of not being what he seemed. The mere sense that about the world there was another living being who knew what he knew, shook down all the self-possession and philosophy which had so long made him assure himself that the assumption of a name was an immaterial circumstance, which, harming no one, could concern no one. Egon Vàsàrhely seemed to have seized his sophisms in a rude grasp, and shaken them down as blossoms fall in wind. He thought with bitter self-contempt how true the cynic was who said that no sin exists so long as it is not found out; that discovery is the sole form which remorse takes.

At times his remorse made him almost afraid of Wanda, almost shrink from her, almost tremble at her regard; at other times it intensified his passion and infused into his embraces a kind of ferocity of triumph. He would show an almost brutal ardour in his caresses, and would think with an almost cruel exultation, 'I was born a serf, and I am her lover, her lord!' Strangely enough, she began to lose something of her high influence upon him, of her spiritual superiority in his sight. She was so entirely, so perpetually his, that she became in a manner tainted with his own degradation. She could no longer check him with a word, calm him with a gesture of restraint. She was conscious of a change in him which she could not explain to herself. His sweetness of temper was broken by occasional irritability that she had never seen before. He was at times melancholy and absorbed; he at times displayed a jealousy which appeared unworthy of herself and him; at other moments he adored her, submitted to her with too great a humility. They were still happy, but their hap-

piness was more uncertain, more disturbed by passing shadows. She told herself that it was always so in marriage, that in the old trite phrase nothing mortal was ever perfect long. But this philosophy failed to reconcile her. She found herself continually pondering on the alteration that she perceived in him, without being able to explain it to herself in any satisfactory manner.

One day he announced to her without preface that he had decided to renounce the name of Sabran; that he preferred to any other the title which she had given him in the Countship of Idrac. She was astonished, but on reflection only saw, in his choice, devotion and deference to herself. Perhaps, too, she reflected with a pang, he desired some foreign mission such as she had once proposed to him; perhaps the life at Hohenszalras was monotonous and too quiet for a man so long used to the movement and excitation of Paris. She suggested the invitation of a circle of guests more often, but he rejected the idea with some impatience. He, who had previously amused himself so well with the part of host to a brilliant society, now professed that he saw nothing but trouble and *ennui* in a house full of people who changed every week, and of royal personages who exacted ceremonious observances that were tedious and burdensome. So they remained alone, for even the Princess Ottilie had gone away to Lilienslust. For her own part she asked nothing better. Her people, her lands, her occupations, her responsibilities, were always interest enough. She loved the stately, serene tread of Time in these mountain solitudes. Life always seemed to her a purer, graver, more august thing when no echo of the world without jarred on the solemnity of the woods and hills. She wanted her children to grow up to love Hohenszalras, as she had always done, far above all pomps and pleasures of courts and cities.

The winter went by, and he spent most of the days out of doors in violent exercise, sledging, skating, wolf-hunting. In the evenings he made music for her in the white room: beautiful, dreamy music, that carried her soul from earth. He played for hours and hours far into the night; he seemed more willing to do anything than to converse. When he talked to her she was sensible of an effort of constraint; it was no longer the careless, happy, spontaneous conversation of a man certain of receiving sympathy in all his opinions, indulgence in all his errors, comprehension in even his vaguest or most eccentric ideas: a certain charm was gone out of their intercourse. She thought sometimes humbly enough, was it because a man always wearies of a woman? Yet she could scarcely think that, for his reverential deference to her alternated with a passion that had lost nothing of its voluptuous intensity.

So the winter passed away. Madame Ottilie was in the South for her health, with her relatives of Lilienhöhe; they invited no one, and so no one could approach them. The children grew and

throve. Bela and his brother had a little sledge of their own, drawn by two Spanish donkeys, white as the snows that wrapped the Iselthal in their serenity and silence. In their little sable coats and their sable-lined hoods the two little boys looked like rosebuds wrapped in brown moss. They were a pretty spectacle upon the ice, with their stately Heiduck, wrapped in his scarlet and black cloak, walking by the gilded shell-shaped sledge.

'Bela loves the ice best. Bela wishes the summer never was!' said the little heir of the Countess of Szalras one day, as he leaped out from under the bearskin of his snow-carriage. His father heard him, and smiled a little bitterly.

'You have the snow in your blood,' he thought. 'I, too, know how I loved the winter with all its privations, how I skimmed like a swallow down the frozen Volga, how I breasted the wind of the North Sea, sad with the dying cries of the swans! But I had an empty stomach and naked limbs under my rough goatskin, and you ride there in your sables and velvets, a proud little prince, and yet you are my son!'

Was he almost angered against his own child for the great heirship to which he was born, as kings are often of their dauphins? Bela looked up at him a little timidly, always being in a certain awe of his father.

'May Bela go with you some day with the big black horses, one day when you go very far?'

'Ask your mother,' said Sabran.

'She will like it,' said the child. 'Yesterday she said you never do think of Bela. She did not say it *to* Bela, but he heard.'

'I will think of him,' said Sabran, with some emotion: he had a certain antagonism to the child, of which he was vaguely ashamed; he was sorry that she should have noticed it. He disliked him because Bela so visibly resembled himself that he was a perpetual reproach; a living sign of how the blood of a Russian lord and of a Persian peasant had been infused into the blood of the Austrian nobles.

The next day he took the child with him on a drive of many leagues, through the frozen highways winding through the frosted forests under the huge snow-covered range of the Glöckner mountains. Bela was in raptures; the grand black Russian horses, whose speed was as the wind, were much more to his taste than the sedate and solemn Spanish asses. When they returned, and Sabran lifted him out of the sledge in the twilight, the child kissed his hand.

'Bela loves you,' he said timidly.

'Why do you?' said his father, surprised and touched. 'Because you are your mother's child?'

Bela did not understand. He said, after a moment of reflection:

'Bela is afraid, when you are angry; very afraid. But Bela does love you.'

Sabran laid his hand on the child's shoulder. 'I shall never be angry if Bela obey his mother, and never pain her. Remember that.'

'He will remember,' said Bela. 'And may he go with the big black horses very soon again?'

'Your mother's horses are just as big, and just as black. Is it not the same thing to go with her?'

'No. Because she takes Bela often; you never.'

'You are ungrateful,' said Sabran, in the tone which always alarmed and awed the bold bright spirit of his child. 'Your mother's love beside mine is like the great mountain beside the speck of dust. Can you understand? You will when you are a man. Obey her and adore her. So you will best please me.'

Bela looked at him with troubled suffused eyes; he went within doors a little sadly, led away by Hubert, and when he reached his nursery and had his furs taken from off him he was still serious, and for once he did not tell his thoughts to Gela, for they were too many for him to be able to master them in words. His father was a beautiful, august, terrible, magnificent figure in his eyes; with the confused fancies of a child's scarce-opened mind he blended together in his admiration Sabran and the great marble form of S. Johann of Prague which stretched its arm towards the lake from the doors of the great entrance, and, as Bela always understood, controlled the waters and the storms at will. Bela feared no one else in all the world, but he feared his father, and for that reason loved him as he loved nothing else in his somewhat selfish and imperious little life.

'It is so good of you to have given Bela that pleasure,' his wife said to him when he entered the white room. 'I know you cannot care to hear a child chatter as I do. It can only be tiresome to you.'

'I will drive him every day if it please *you*,' said Sabran.

'No, no; that would be too much to exact from you. Besides, he would soon despise his donkeys, and desert poor Gela. I take him but seldom myself for that reason. He has an idea that he is immeasurably older than Gela. It is true a year at their ages is more difference than are ten years at ours.'

'The child said something to me, as if he had heard you say I do not care for him?'

'You do not, very much. Surely you are inclined to be harsh to him?'

'If I be so, it is only because I see so much of myself in him.'

He looked at her, assailed once more by the longing which at times came over him to tell her the truth of himself, to risk everything rather than deceive her longer, to throw himself upon her mercy, and cut short this life which had so much of duplicity, so

much of concealment, that every year added to it was a stone added to the mountain of his sins. But when he looked at her he dared not. The very grace and serenity of her daunted him; all the signs of nobility in her, from the repose of her manner to the very beauty of her hands, with their great rings gleaming on the long and slender fingers, seemed to awe him into silence. She was so proud a woman, so great a lady, so patrician in all her prejudices, her habits, her hereditary qualities, he dared not tell her that he had betrayed her thus. An infidelity, a folly, even any other crime he thought he could have summoned courage to confess to her; but to say to her, the daughter of a line of princes: 'I, who have made you the mother of my children, I was born a bastard and a serf!' How could he dare say that? Anything else she might forgive, he thought, since love is great, but never that. Nay, a cold sickness stole over him as he thought again that she came of great lords who had meted justice out over whole provinces for a thousand years; and he had wronged her so deeply that the human tongue scarcely held any word of infamy enough to name his crime. The law would set her free, if she chose, from a man who had so betrayed her, and his children would be bastards like himself.

He had stretched himself on a great couch covered with white bear-skins. He was in shadow; she was in the light that came from the fire on the wide hearth, and from the oriel window near, a red warm dusky light, that fell on the jewels on her hands, the furs on her skirts, the very pearls about her throat.

She glanced at him anxiously, seeing how motionless he lay there, with his head turned backward on the cushions.

'I am afraid you are weak still from that wound,' she said, as she rose and approached him. 'Greswold assures me it has left no trace, but I am always afraid. And you look often so pale. Perhaps you exert yourself too much? Let the wolves be. Perhaps it is too cold for you? Would you like to go to the south? Do not think of me; my only happiness is to do whatever you wish.'

He kissed her hand with deep, unfeigned emotion. 'I believe in angels since I knew you,' he murmured. 'No; I will not take you away from the winter and the people that you love. I am well enough. Greswold is right. I could not master those horses if I were not strong; be sure of that.'

'But I always fear that it is dull here for you?'

'Dull! with you? "Custom cannot stale her infinite variety." That was written in prophecy of your charm for me.'

'You will always flatter me! And I am not "various" at all; I am too grave to be entertaining. I am just the German housemother who cares for the children and for you.'

He laughed.

'Is that your portrait of yourself? I think Carolus Duran's is truer, my grand châtelaine. When you are at Court the whole

circle seems to fade to nothing before your presence. Though there are so many women high-born and beautiful there, you eclipse them all.'

'Only in your eyes! And you know I care nothing for courts. What I like is the life here, where one quiet day is the pattern of all the other days. If I were sure that you were content in it——'

'Why should you think of that?'

'My love, tell me honestly, do you never miss the world?'

He rose and walked to the hearth. He, whose life was a long lie, never lied to her if he could avoid it; and he knew very well that he did miss the world with all its folly, stimulant, and sin. Sometimes the moral air here seemed to him too pure, too clear.

'Did I do so I should be thankless indeed—thankless as madmen are who do not know the good done to them. I am like a ship that has anchored in a fair haven after press of weather. I infinitely prefer to see none but yourself; when others are here we are of necessity so much apart. If the weather,' he added more lightly, 'did not so very often wear Milton's grey sandals, there would be nothing one could ever wish changed in the life here. For such great riders as we are, that is a matter of regret. Wet saddles are too often our fate, but in compensation our forests are so green.'

She did not press the question.

But the next day she wrote a letter to a relative who was a great minister and had preponderating influence in the council chamber of the Austrian Empire. She did not speak to Sabran of the letter that she sent.

She had not known any of that disillusion which befalls most women in their love. Her husband had remained her lover, passionately, ardently, jealously; and the sincerity of his devotion to her had spared her all that terrible consciousness of the man's satiety which usually confronts a woman in the earliest years of union. She shrank now with horror from the fear which came to her that this passion might, like so many others, alter and fade under the dulness of habit. She had high courage and clear vision; she met half-way the evil that she dreaded.

In the spring a Foreign Office despatch from Vienna came to him and surprised and moved him strongly. With it in his hand he sought her at once.

'You did this!' he said quickly. 'They offer me the Russian mission.'

She grew a little pale, but had courage to smile. She had seen by a glance at his face the pleasure the offer gave him.

'I only told my cousin Kunst that I thought you might be persuaded to try public life, if he proposed it to you.'

'When did you say that?'

'One day in the winter, when I asked you if you did not miss the world.'

'I never thought I betrayed that I did so.'

'You were only over eager to deny it. And I know your generosity, my love. You miss the world; we will go back to it for a little. It will only make our life here dearer—I hope.'

He was silent; emotion mastered him. 'You have the most unselfish nature that ever was!' he said brokenly. 'It will be a cruel sacrifice to you, and yet you urge it for my sake.'

'Dear, will you not understand? What is for your sake is what is most for mine. I see you long, despite yourself, to be amidst men once more, and to use your rare talents as you cannot use them here. It is only right that you should have the power to do so. If our life here has taken the hold on your heart then, I think you will come back to it all the more gladly. And then I too have my vanity; I shall be proud for the world to see how you can fill a great station, conduct a difficult negotiation, distinguish yourself in every way. When they praise you, I shall be repaid a thousand times for any sacrifice of my own tastes that there may be.'

He heard her with many conflicting emotions, of which a passionate gratitude was the first and highest.

'You make me ashamed,' he said in a low voice. 'No man can be worthy of such goodness as yours; and I——'

Once more the avowal of the truth rose to his lips, but stayed unuttered. His want of courage took refuge in procrastination.

'We need not decide for a day or two,' he added: 'they give me time; we will think well. When do you think I must reply?'

'Surely soon; your delay would seem disrespect. You know we Austrians are very ceremonious.'

'And if I accept, it will not make you unhappy?'

'My love, no, a thousand times, no; your choice is always mine.'

He stooped and kissed her hand.

'You are ever the same,' he murmured. 'The noblest, the most generous——'

She smiled bravely. 'I am quite sure you have decided already. Go to my table yonder, and write a graceful acceptance to my cousin Kunst. You will be happier when it is posted.'

'No, I will think a little. It is not a thing to be done in haste. It will be irrevocable.'

'Irrevocable? A diplomatic mission? You can throw it up when you please. You are not bound to serve longer than you choose.'

He was silent: what he had thought himself had been of the irrevocable insult he would be held to have offered to the emperor, the nation, and the world, if ever they knew.

'It will not be liked if I accept for a mere caprice. One must never treat a State as Bela treats his playthings,' he said as he

rang, and when the servant answered the summons ordered them to saddle his horse.

'No; there is no haste. Glearemberg is not definitely recalled, I think.'

But as she spoke she knew very well that, unknown to himself, he had already decided; that the joy and triumph the offer had brought to him were both too great for him eventually to resist them. He sat down and re-read the letter.

She had said the truth to him, but she had not said all the truth. She had a certain desire that he should justify her marriage in the eyes of the world by some political career brilliantly followed; but this was not her chief motive in wishing him to return to the life of cities. She had seen that he was in a manner disquieted, discontented, and attributed it to discontent at the even routine of their lives. The change in his moods and tempers, the arbitrary violence of his love for her, vaguely alarmed and troubled her; she seemed to see the germ of much that might render their lives far less happy. She realised that she had given herself to one who had the capacity of becoming a tyrannical possessor, and retained, even after six years of marriage, the irritable ardour of a lover. She knew that it was better for them both that the distraction and the restraint of the life of the world should occupy some of his thoughts, and check the over-indulgence of a passion which in solitude grew feverish and morbid. She had not the secret of the change in him, of which the result alone was apparent to her, and she could only act according to her light. If he grew morose, tyrannical, violent, all the joy of their life would be gone. She knew that men alter curiously under the sense of possession. She felt that her influence, though strong, was not paramount as it had been, and she perceived that he no longer took much interest in the administration of the estates, in which he had shown great ability in the first year of their marriage. She had been forced to resume her old governance of all those matters, and she knew that it was not good for him to live without occupation. She feared that the sameness of the days, to her so delightful, to him grew tiresome. To ride constantly, to hunt sometimes, to make music in the evenings—this was scarcely enough to fill up the life of a man who had been a *vieux* on the bitumen of the boulevards for so long.

A woman of a lesser nature would have been too vain to doubt the all-sufficiency of her own presence to enthral and to content him; but she was without vanity, and had more wisdom than most women. It did not even once occur to her, as it would have done incessantly to most, that the magnificence of all her gifts to him were title-deeds to his content for life.

Public life would be her enemy, would take her from the solitudes she loved, would change her plans for her children's education, would bring the world continually betwixt herself and her

husband; but since he wished it that was all she thought of, all her law.

'Surely he will accept?' said Mdme. Ottilie, who had returned from the south of France.

'Yes, he will accept,' said his wife. 'He does not know it, but he will.'

'I cannot imagine why he should affect to hesitate. It is the career he is made for, with his talents, his social graces.'

'He does not affect; he hesitates for my sake. He knows I am never happy away from Hohenszalras.'

'Why did you write then to Kunst?'

'Because it will be better for him; he is neither a poet, nor a philosopher, to be able to live away from the world.'

'Which are you?'

'Neither; only a woman who loves the home she was born in, and the people she——'

'Reigns over,' added the Princess. 'Admit, my beloved, that a part of your passion for Hohenszalras comes of the fact that you cannot be quite as omnipotent in the world as you are here!'

Wanda von Szalras smiled. 'Perhaps; the best motive is always mixed with a baser. But I adore the country and country life. I abhor cities.'

'Men are always like Horace,' said the Princess. 'They admire rural life, but they remain for all that with Augustus.'

At that moment they heard the hoofs of his horse galloping up the great avenue. A quarter of an hour went by, for he changed his dress before coming into his wife's presence. He would no more have gone to her with the dust or the mud of the roads upon him than he would have gone in such disarray into the inner circle of the Kaiserin.

When he entered, she did not speak, but the Princess Ottilie said with vivacity:

'Well! you accept, of course?'

'I will neither accept nor decline. I will do what Wanda wishes.'

The Princess gave an impatient movement of her little foot on the carpet.

'Wanda is a hermit,' she said; 'she should have dwelt in a cave, and lived on berries with S. Scholastica. What is the use of leaving it to her? She will say No. She loves her mountains.'

'Then she shall stay amidst her mountains.'

'And you will throw all your future away?'

'Dear mother, I have no future—should have had none but for her.'

'All that is very pretty, but after nearly six years of marriage it is not necessary to *faire des madrigaux*.'

The Princess sat a little more erect, angrily, and continued to tap her foot upon the floor. His wife was silent for a little while;

then she went over to her writing-table, and wrote with a firm hand a few lines in German. She rose and gave the sheet to Sabran.

'Copy that,' she said, 'or give it as many graces of style as you like.'

His heart beat, his sight seemed dim as he read what she had written.

It was an acceptance.

'See, my dear René!' said the Princess, when she understood; 'never combat a woman on her own ground and with her own weapon—unselfishness! The man must always lose in a conflict of that sort.'

The tears stood in his eyes as he answered her—

'Ah, Madame! if I say what I think, you will accuse me again of *faisant des madrigaux*!'

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WEEK or two later Sabran arrived alone at their palace in Vienna, and was cordially received by the great minister whom Wanda called her cousin Kunst. He had also an audience of his Imperial master, who showed him great kindness and esteem; he had been always popular and welcome at the Hofburg. His new career awaited him under auspices the most engaging; his intelligence, which was great, took pleasure at the prospect of the field awaiting it; and his personal pride was gratified and flattered at the personal success which he enjoyed. He was aware that the brain he was gifted with would amply sustain all the demands for *finesse* and penetration that a high diplomatic mission would make upon it, and he knew that the immense fortune he commanded through his wife would enable him to fill his place with the social brilliancy and splendour it required.

He felt happier than he had done ever since the day in the forest when the name of Vassia Kazán had been said in his ear; he had recovered his nerve, his self-command, his *insouciance*; he was once more capable of honestly forgetting that he was anything besides the great gentleman he appeared. There was an additional pungency for him in the fact of his mission being to Russia. He hated the country as a renegade hates a religion he has abandoned. The undying hereditary enmity which must always exist, *sub rosa*, betwixt Austria and Russia was in accordance with the antagonism he himself felt for every rood of the soil, for every syllable of the tongue, of the Muscovite. He knew that Paul Zabaroff, his father's legitimate son, was a mighty prince, a keen politician, a favourite courtier at the Court of St. Petersburg.

The prospect of himself appearing at that Court as the representative of a great nation, with the occasion and the power to meet Paul Zabaroff as an equal, and defeat his most cherished intrigues, his most subtle projects, gave an intensity to his triumph such as no mere social honours or gratified ambition could alone have given him. If the minister had searched the whole of the Austrian empire through, in all the ranks of men he could have found no one so eager to serve the purpose and the interests of his Imperial master against the rivalry of Russia, as he had found in one who had been born a naked *moujik* in the *isba* of a Persian peasant.

Even though this distinction which was offered him would rest like all else on a false basis, yet it intoxicated him, and would gratify his desires to be something above and beyond the mere prince-consort that he was. He knew that his talents were real, that his tact and perception were unerring, that his power to analyse and influence men was great. All these qualities he felt would enable him in a public career to conquer admiration and eminence. He was not yet old enough to be content to regard the future as a thing belonging to his sons, nor had he enough philo-progenitiveness ever to do so at any age.

'To return so to Russia!' he thought with rapture. All the ambition that had been in him in his college days at the Lycée Clovis, which had never taken definite shape, partly from indolence and partly from circumstance, and had not been satisfied even by the brilliancy of his marriage, was often awakened and spurred by the greatness of the social position of all those with whom he associated. In his better moments he sometimes thought, 'I am only the husband of the Countess von Szalras; I am only the father of the future lords of Hohenszalras;' and the reflection that the world might regard him so made him restless and ill at ease.

He knew that, being what he was, he would add to his crime tenfold by acceptance of the honour offered to him. He knew that the more prominent he was in the sight of men, the deeper would be his fall if ever the truth were told. What gauge had he that some old school-mate, dowered with as long a memory as Vàsàrhely's, might not confront him with the same charge and challenge? True, this danger had always seemed to him so remote that never since he had landed at Romaris bay had he been troubled by any apprehension of it. His own assured position, his own hauteur of bearing, his own perfect presence of mind, would have always enabled him to brave safely such an ordeal under the suspicion of any other than Vàsàrhely; with any other he could have relied on his own coolness and courage to have borne him with immunity through any such recognition. Besides, he had always reckoned, and reckoned justly, that no one would ever dare to insult the Marquis de Sabran with a suspicion

that could have no proof to sustain it. So he had always reasoned, and events had justified his expectations and deductions.

This month that he now passed in Vienna was the proudest of his life; not perhaps the happiest, for beneath his contentment there was a jarring remembrance that he was deceiving a great sovereign and his ministers. But he thrust this sting of conscience aside whenever it touched him, and abandoned himself with almost youthful gladness to the felicitations he received, the arrangements he had to make, and the contemplation of the future before him. The pleasures of the gay and witty city surrounded him, and he was too handsome, too seductive, and too popular not to be sought by women of all ranks, who rallied him on his long devotion to his wife, and did their best to make him ashamed of constancy.

'What beasts we are!' he thought, as he left Daum's at the flush of dawn, after a supper there which he had given, and which had nearly degenerated into an orgie. 'Yet is it unfaithfulness to her? My soul is always hers and my love.'

Still his conscience smote him, and he felt ashamed as he thought of her proud frank eyes, of her noble trust in him, of her pure and lofty life led there under the snow summits of her hills.

He worshipped her, with all his life he worshipped her; a moment's caprice, a mere fume and fever of senses surprised and astray, were not infidelity to her. So he told himself, with such sophisms as men most use when most they are at fault, as he walked home in the rose of the daybreak to her great palace, which like all else of hers was his.

As he ascended the grand staircase, with the escutcheon of the Szalras repeated on the gilded bronze of its balustrade, a chill and a depression stole upon him. He loved her with intensity and ardour and truth, yet he had been disloyal to her; he had forgotten her, he had been unworthy of her. What worth were all the women in the world beside her? What did they seem to him now, these Delilahs who had beguiled him? He loathed the memory of them; he wondered at himself. He went through the great house slowly towards his own rooms, pausing now and then, as though he had never seen them before, to glance at some portrait, some stand of arms, some banner commemorative of battle, some quiver, bow, and pussikan taken from the Turk.

On his table he found a telegram sent from Lienz:

'I am so glad you are amused and happy. We are all well here.

(Signed) 'WANDA.'

No torrents of rebuke, no scenes of rage, no passion of reproaches could have carried reproach to him like those simple words of trustful affection.

'An angel of God should have descended to be worthy her!' he thought.

The next evening there was a ball at the Hof. It was later in the season than such things were usually, but the visit to the court of the sovereign of a neighbouring nation had detained their majesties and the nobility in Vienna. The ball was accompanied by all that pomp and magnificence which characterise such festivities, and Sabran, present at it, was the object of universal congratulation and much observation, as the ambassador-designate to Russia.

Court dress became him, and his great height and elegance of manner made him noticeable even in that brilliant crowd of notables. All the greatest ladies distinguished him with their smiles, but he gave them no more than courtesy. He saw only before the 'eye of memory' his wife as he had seen her at the last court ball, with the famous pearls about her throat, and her train of silver tissue sown with pearls and looped up with white lilac.

'It is the flower I like best,' she had said to him. 'It brought me your first love-message in Paris, do you remember? It said little; it was very discreet, but it said enough!'

'You are always thinking of Wanda!' said the Countess Brancka to him now, with a tinge of impatience in her tone.

He coloured a little, and said with that hauteur with which he always repressed any passing jest at his love for his wife:

'When both one's duty and joy point the same way it is easy to follow them in thought.'

'I hope you follow them in action too,' said Madame Brancka.

'If I do not, I am at least only responsible to Wanda.'

'Who would be a lenient judge you mean?' said the Countess, with a certain smile that displeased him. 'Do not be too sure; she is a von Szalras. They are not agreeable persons when they are angered.'

'I have not been so unhappy as to see her so,' said Sabran coldly, with a vague sense of uneasiness. As much as it is possible for a man to dislike a woman who is very lovely, and young enough to be still charming in the eyes of the world, he disliked Olga Brancka. He had known her for many years in Paris, not intimately, but by force of being in the same society, and, like many men who do not lead very decent lives themselves, he frankly detested *cocodettes*.

'If we want these manners we have our *lionnes*,' he was wont to say, at a time when Cochonette was seen every day behind his horses by the Cascade, and it had been the height of the Countess Olga's ambition at that time to be called like Cochonette. A certain resemblance there was between the great lady and the wicked one; they had the same small delicate sarcastic features, the same red gold curls, the same perfect colourless complexion;

but where Cochonette had eyes of the lightest blue, the wife of Count Stefan had the luminous piercing black eyes of the Muscovite physiognomy. Still the likeness was there, and it made the sight of Mdme. Brancka distasteful to him, since his memories of the other were far from welcome. It was for Cochonette that he had broken the bank at Monte Carlo, and into her lap that he had thrown all the gold rouleaux at a time when in his soul he had already adored Wanda von Szalras, and had despised himself for returning to the slough of his old pleasures. It was Cochonette who had sold his secrets to the Prussians, and brought them down upon him in the farmhouse amongst the orchards of the Orléannais, while she passed safely through the German lines and across the frontier, laden with her jewels and her *valeurs* of all kinds, saying in her teeth as she went: 'He will never see that Austrian woman again!' That had been the end of all he had known of Cochonette, and a presentiment of perfidy, of danger, of animosity always came over him whenever he saw the *joli petit minois* which in profile was so like Cochonette's, looking up from under the loose auburn curls that Mdme. Olga had copied from her.

Olga Brancka now looked at him with some malice and with more admiration; she was very pretty that night, blazing with diamonds and with her beautifully shaped person as bare as Court etiquette would permit. In her red gold curls she had some butterflies in jewels flashing all the colours of the rainbow and glowing like sunbeams. There was such a butterfly, big as the great Emperor moth, between her breasts, making their whiteness look like snow.

Instinctively Sabran glanced away from her. He felt an *étourdissement* that irritated him. The movement did not escape her. She took his arm.

'We will move about a little while,' she said. 'Let us talk of Wanda, *mon beau* cousin, since you can think of no one else. And so you are really going to Russia?'

'I believe so.'

'It will be a great sacrifice to her; any other woman would be in paradise in St. Petersburg, but she will be wretched.'

'I hope not; if I thought so I would not go.'

'You cannot but go now; you have made your choice. You will be happy enough. You will play again enormously, and Wanda has so much money, that if you lose millions it will not ruin her.'

'I shall certainly not play with my wife's money. I have never played since my marriage.'

'For all that you will play in St. Petersburg. It is in the air. A saint could not help doing it, and you are not a saint by nature, though you have become one since marriage. But you know conversions by marriage do not last. They are like compulsory confessions. They mean nothing.'

'You are very malicious to-night, madame,' said Sabran, absently. He was in no mood for banter, and was disinclined to take up her challenge.

'Call me at least *cousinette*,' said Mdme. Olga; 'we are cousins, you know, thanks to Wanda. Oh! she will be very unhappy in St. Petersburg; she will not amuse herself, she never does. She is incapable of a flirtation; she never touches a card. When she dances it is only because she must, and then it is only a quadrille or a contre-dance. She always reminds me of Marie Thérèse's "In our position nothing is a trifle." You remember the Empress's letters to Versailles?'

Sabran was very much angered, but he was afraid to express his anger lest it should seem to make him absurd.

'Madame,' he said, with ill-repressed irritation, 'I know you speak only in jest, but I must take the liberty to tell you—however bourgeois it appear—that I do not allow a jest even from you upon my wife. Anything she does is perfect in my sight, and if she be imbued with the old traditions of gentle blood, too many ladies desert them in these days for me not to be grateful to her for her loyalty.'

She listened, with her bright black eyes fixed on him; then she leaned a little more closely on his arm.

'Do you know that you said that very well? Most men are ridiculous when they are in love with their wives, but it becomes you. Wanda is perfect, we all know that; you are not alone in thinking so. Ask Egon!'

The face of Sabran changed as he heard that name. As she saw the change she thought: 'Can it be possible that he is jealous?'

Aloud she said with a little laugh: 'I almost wonder Egon did not run you through the heart before you married. Now, of course, he is reconciled to the inevitable; or, if not reconciled, he has to submit to it as we all have to do. He grows very *farouche*; he lives between his troopers and his castle of Taróc, like a barbaric lord of the Middle Ages. Were you ever at Taróc? It is worth seeing—a huge fortress, old as the days of Ottokar, in the very heart of the Karpathians. He leads a wild, fierce life enough there. If he keep the memory of Wanda with him it is as some men keep an idolatry for what is dead.'

Sabran listened with a sombre irritation. 'Suppose we leave my wife's name in peace,' he said coldly. 'The *grosser cotillon* is about to begin; may I aspire to the honour?'

As he led her out, and the light fell on her red gold curls, on her dazzling butterflies, her armour of diamonds, her snow-white skin, a thousand memories of Cochonette came over him, though the scene around him was the ball-room of the Hofburg, and the woman whose great bouquet of *rêve d'or* roses touched his hand was a great lady who had been the wife of Gela von Szalras, and

the daughter of the Prince Serriatine. He distrusted her, he despised her, he disliked her so strongly that he was almost ashamed of his own antagonism; and yet her contact, her grace of movement, the mere scent of the bouquet of roses had a sort of painful and unwilling intoxication for the moment for him.

He was glad when the long and gorgeous figures of the cotillon had tired out even her steel-like nerves, and he was free to leave the palace and go home to sleep. He looked at a miniature of his wife as he undressed; the face of it, with its tenderness and its nobility, seemed to him, after the face of this other woman, like the pure high air of the Iselthal after the heated and unhealthy atmosphere of a gambling-room.

The next day there was a review of troops in the Prater. His presence was especially desired; he rode his favourite horse Siegfried, which had been brought up from the Tauern for the occasion. The weather was brilliant, the spectacle was grand; his spirits rose, his natural gaiety of temper returned. He was addressed repeatedly by the sovereigns present. Other men spoke of him, some with admiration, some with envy, as one who would become a power at the court and in the empire.

As he rode homeward, when the manœuvres were over, making his way slowly through the merry crowds of the good-humoured populace, through the streets thronged with glittering troops and hung with banners, and odorous with flowers, he thought to himself with a light heart: 'After all, I may do her some honour before I die.'

When he reached home and his horse was led away, a servant approached him with a sealed letter lying on a gold salver. A courier, who said that he had travelled with it without stopping from Taróc, had brought it from the Most High the Prince Vàsàrhely.

Sabran's heart stood still as he took the letter and passed up the staircase to his own apartments. Once there he ordered his servants away, locked the doors, and, then only, broke the seal.

There were two lines written on the sheet inside. They said:

'I forbid you to serve my sovereign. If you persist, I must relate to him, under secresy, what I know.'

They were fully signed—'Egon Vàsàrhely.' They had been sent by a courier, to ensure delivery and avoid the publicity of the telegraph. They had been written as soon as the tidings of his appointment to the Russian mission had become known at the mountain fortress of Taróc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

As the carriage of the Countess Olga rolled home through the Graben after the military spectacle, she stopped it suddenly, and signed to an old man in the crowd who was waiting to cross the road until a regiment of cuirassiers had rolled by. He was eyeing them critically, as only an old soldier does look at troops.

'Is it you, Georg?' said Madame Olga. 'What brings you here?'

'I came from Taróc with a letter from the Prince, my master,' answered the man, an old hussar who had carried Vàsàrhely in his arms off the field of Königsgratz, after dragging him from under a heap of dead men and horses.

'A letter! To whom?' asked Olga, who always was curious and persistent in investigation of all her brother-in-law's movements and actions.

Vàsàrhely had not laid any injunction as to secresy, only as to speed, upon his faithful servant; so that Georg replied, unwitting of harm, 'To the Markgraf von Sabran, my Countess.'

'A letter that could not go by post—how strange! And from Egon to Wanda's husband!' she thought, with her inquisitive eagerness awakened. Aloud she bade the old trooper call at her palace for a packet for Taróc, to make excuse for having stopped and questioned him, and drove onward lost in thought.

'Perhaps it is a challenge late in the day!' she thought, with a laugh; but she was astonished and perplexed that any communication should take place between these men; she perplexed her mind in vain in the effort to imagine what tie could connect them, what mystery mutually affecting them could lie beneath the secret of Vassia Kazán.

When, on the morrow, she heard at Court that the Emperor was deeply incensed at the caprice and disrespect of the Count von Idrac, as he was called at Court, who, at the eleventh hour, had declined a mission already accepted by him, and of which the offer had been in itself an unprecedented mark of honour and confidence, her swift sagacity instantly associated the action, apparently so excuseless and inexcusable, with the letter sent up from Taróc. It was still as great a mystery to her as it had been before what the contents of the letter could have been, but she had no doubt that in some way or another it had brought about the resignation of the appointment. It awakened a still more intense curiosity in her, but she was too wise to whisper her suspicion to any one. To her friends at the Court she said, with laughter: 'A night or two ago I chanced to tell Sabran that his wife would be wretched at

St. Petersburg. That is sure to have been enough for him. He is such a devoted husband.'

No one of course believed her, but they received the impression that she knew the real cause of his resignation, though she could not be induced to say it.

What did it matter to her? Nothing, indeed. But the sense of a secret withheld from her was to Mdme. Olga like the slot of the fox to a young hound. She might have a thousand secrets of her own if it pleased her, but she could not endure any one else to guard one. Besides, in a vague, feverish, angry way, she was almost in love with the man who was so faithful to his wife that he had looked away from her as from some unclean thing when she had wished to dazzle him. She had no perception that the secret could concern him himself very nearly, but she thought it was probably one which he and Egon Vàsàrhely, for reasons of their own, chose to share and keep hidden. And if it were a secret that prevented Sabran from going to the Court of Russia? Then, surely, it was one worth knowing? And if she gained a knowledge of it, and his wife had none?—what a superiority would be hers, what a weapon always to hand!

She did not intend any especial cruelty or compass any especial end: she was actuated by a vague desire to interrupt a current of happiness that flowed on smoothly without her, to interfere where she had no earthly title or reason to do so, merely because she was disregarded by persons content with each other. It is not always definite motives which have the most influence; the subtlest poisons are those which enter the system we know not how, and penetrate it ere we are aware. The only thing which had ever held her back from any extremes of evil had been the mere habit of good-breeding and an absolute egotism which had saved her from all strong passions. Now something that was like passion had touched her under the sting of Sabran's indifference, and with it she became tenacious, malignant, and unsparing: adroit she had always been. Instinct is seldom at fault when we are conscious of an enemy, and Sabran's had not erred when it had warned him against the wife of Stefan Brancka as the serpent who would bring woe and disaster to his paradise.

In some three months' time she received a more explicit answer from her cousin in St. Petersburg. Giving the precise dates, he told her that Vassia Kazán was the name given to the son of Count Paul Ivanovitch Zabaroff by a wayside amour with one of his own serfs at a village near the border line of Astrachan. He narrated the early history of the youth, and said that he had been amongst the passengers on board a Havre ship, which had foundered with all hands. So far the brief record of Vassia Kazán was clear and complete. But it told her nothing. She was unreasonably enraged, and looked at the little piece of burnt paper as though she would wrench the secret out of it.

'There must be so much more to know,' she thought. 'What would a mere drowned boy be to either of those men—a boy dead too all these years before?'

She wrote insolently to her cousin, that the Third Section, with its eyes of Argus and its limbs of Vishnoo, had always been but an over-grown imbecile, and set her woman's wits to accomplish what the Third Section had failed to do for her. So much she thought of it that the name seemed forced into her very brain; she seemed to hear every one saying—'Vassia Kazán.' It was a word to conjure with, at least: she could at the least try the effect of its utterance any day upon either of those who had made it the key of their correspondence. Russia had written down Vassia Kazán as dead, and the mystery which enveloped the name would not open to her. She knew her country too well not to know that this bold statement might cover some political secret, some story wholly unlike that which was given her. Vassia Kazán might have lived and have incurred the suspicions of the police, and be dwelling far away in the death in life of Siberian mines, or deep sunk in some fortress, like a stone at the bottom of a well. The reply not only did not beget her belief in it, but gave her range for the widest and wildest conjectures of imagination. 'It is some fault, some folly, some crime, who can tell? And Vassia Kazán is the victim, or the associate, or the confidant of it. But what is it? And how does Egon know of it?'

She passed the summer in pleasures of all kinds, but the subject did not lose its power over her, nor did she forget the face of Sabran as he had turned it away from her in the ball-room of the Hofburg.

He himself had left the capital, after affirming to the minister that private reasons, which he could not enter into, had induced him to entreat the Imperial pardon for so sudden a change of resolve, and to solicit permission to decline the high honour that had been vouchsafed to him.

'What shall I say to Wanda?' he asked himself incessantly, as the express train swung through the grand green country towards Salzburg.

She was sitting on the lake terrace with the Princess, when a telegram from her cousin Kunst was brought to her. Bela and Gela were playing near with squadrons of painted cuirassiers, and the great dogs were lying on the marble pavement at her feet. It was a golden close to a sunless but fine day; the snow peaks were growing rosy as the sun shone for an instant behind the Venediger range, and the lake was calm and still and green, one little boat going noiselessly across it from the Holy Isle to the farther side.

'What a pity to leave it all!' she thought as she took the telegram.

The minister's message was curt and angered:

'Your husband has resigned; he makes himself and me ridiculous. Unable to guess his motive, I am troubled and embarrassed beyond expression.'

The other, from Sabran, said simply: 'I am coming home. I give up Russia.'

'Any bad news?' the Princess asked, seeing the seriousness of her face. Her niece rose and gave her the papers.

'Is Réné mad?' she exclaimed as she read. His wife, who was startled and dismayed at the affront to her cousin and to her sovereign, yet had been unable to repress a movement of personal gladness, hastened to say in his defence:

'Be sure he has some grave, good reason, dear mother. He knows the world too well to commit a folly. Unexplained, it looks strange, certainly; but he will be home to-night or in the early morning; then we shall know; and be sure we shall find him right.'

'Right!' echoed the Princess, lifting the little girl who was her namesake off her knee, a child white as a snowdrop, with golden curls, who looked as if she had come out of a band of Correggio's baby angels.

'He is always right,' said his wife, with a gesture towards Bela, who had paused in his play to listen, with a leaden cuirassier of the guard suspended in the air.

'You are an admirable wife, Wanda,' said the Princess, with extreme displeasure on her delicate features. 'You defend your lord when through him you are probably *brouillée* with your sovereign for life.'

She added, her voice tremulous with astonishment and anger: 'It is a caprice, an insolence, that no sovereign and no minister could pardon. I am most truly your husband's friend, but I can conceive no possible excuse for such a change at the very last moment in a matter of such vast importance.'

'Let us wait, dear mother,' said Wanda, softly. 'It is not you who would condemn Réné unheard?'

'But such a breach of etiquette! What explanation can ever annul it?'

'Perhaps none. I know it is a very grave offence that he has committed, and yet I cannot help being happy,' said his wife with a smile, as she lifted up the little Ottilie, and murmured over the child's fair curls, 'Ah, my dear little dove! We are not going to Russia after all. You little birds will not leave your nest!'

'Bela is not going to the snow palace?' said he, whose ears were very quick, and to whom his attendants had told marvellous narratives of an utterly imaginary Russia.

'No; are not you glad, my dear?'

He thought very gravely for a moment.

'Bela is not sure. Marc says Bela would have slaves in Russia, and might beat them.'

'Bela would be beaten himself if he did, and by my own hand,' said his mother very gravely. 'Oh, child! where did you get your cruelty?'

'He is not cruel,' said the Princess. 'He is only masterful.'

'Alas! it is the same thing.'

She sent the children indoors, and remained after the sun-glow had all faded, and Mdme. Ottilie had gone away to her own rooms, and paced to and fro the length of the terrace, troubled by an anxiety which she would have owned to no one. What could have happened to make him so offend alike the State and the Court? She tormented herself with wondering again and again whether she had used any incautious expression in her letters which could have betrayed to him the poignant regret the coming exile gave her. No! she was sure she had not done so. She had only written twice, preferring telegrams as quicker, and, to a man, less troublesome than letters. She knew courts and cabinets too well not to know that the step her husband had taken was one which would wholly ruin the favour he enjoyed with the former, and wholly take away all chance of his being ever called again to serve the latter. Personally she was indifferent to that kind of ambition; but her attachment to the Imperial house was too strong, and her loyalty to it too hereditary, for her not to be alarmed at the idea of losing its good-will. Disquieted and afraid of all kinds of formless unknown ills, she went with a heavy heart into the Rittersäal to a dinner for which she could find no appetite. The Princess also, so talkative and vivacious at other times, was silent and pre-occupied. The evening passed tediously. He did not come.

It was past midnight, and she had given up all hope of his arrival, when she heard the returning trot of the horses, that had been sent over to Matrey in the evening on the chance of his being there. She was in her own chamber, having dismissed her women, and was trying in vain to keep her thoughts to nightly prayer. At the sound of the horses' feet without, she threw on a *négligé* of white satin and lace, and went out on to the staircase to meet him. As he came up the broad stairs, with Donau and Neva gladly leaping on him, he looked up and saw her against the background of oak and tapestry and old armour, with the light of a great Persian lamp in metal that swung above shed full upon her. She had never looked more lovely to him than as she stood so, her eyes eagerly searching the dim shadow for him, and the loose white folds embroidered in silk with pale roses flowing downward from her throat to her feet. He drew her within her chamber, and took her in his arms with a passionate gesture.

'Let us forget everything,' he murmured, 'except that we have been parted nearly a month!'

CHAPTER XXV.

In the morning, after breakfast in the little Saxe room, she said to him with gentle firmness: 'Réné, you must tell me now—why have you refused Russia?'

He had known that the question must come, and all the way on his homeward journey he had been revolving in his mind the answer he would give to it. He was very pale, but otherwise he betrayed no agitation as he turned and looked at her.

'That is what I cannot tell you,' he replied.

She could not believe she heard aright.

'What do you mean?' she asked him. 'I have had a message from Kunst; he is deeply angered. I understand that, after all was arranged, you abruptly resigned the Russian mission. I ask your reasons. It is a very grave step to have taken. I suppose your motives must be very strong ones?'

'They are so,' said Sabran; and he continued in the forced and measured tone of one who recites what he has taught himself to say: 'It is quite natural that your cousin Kunst should be offended; the Emperor also. You perhaps will be the same when I say to you that I cannot tell you, as I cannot tell them, the grounds of my withdrawal. Perhaps you, like them, will not forgive it.'

Her nostrils dilated and her breast heaved: she was startled, mortified, amazed. 'You do not choose to tell *me*!' she said in stupefaction.

'I cannot tell you.'

She gazed at him with the first bitterness of wrath that he had ever seen upon her face. She had been used to perfect submission of others all her life. She had the blood in her of stern princes, who had meted out rule and justice against which there had been no appeal. She was accustomed even in him to deference, homage, consideration, to be consulted always, deferred to often. His answer for the moment seemed to her an unwarrantable insult.

Her influence, her relatives, her sovereign, had given him one of the highest honours conceivable, and he did not choose to even say why he was thankless for it! Passionate and withering words rose to her lips, but she restrained their utterance. Not even in that moment could she bring herself to speak what might seem to rebuke him with the weight of all his debt to her. She remained silent, but he understood all the intense indignation that held her speechless there. He approached her more nearly, and spoke with emotion, but with a certain sternness in his voice:

'I know very well that I must offend and even outrage you. But I cannot tell you my motives. It is the first time that I have

ever acted independently of you or failed to consult your wishes. I only venture to remind you that marriage does give to the man the right to do so, though I have never availed myself of it. Nay, even now, I owe you too much to be ingrate enough to take refuge in my authority as your husband. I prefer to owe more, as I have owed so much, to your tenderness. I prefer to ask of you, by your love for me, not to press me for an answer that I am not in a position to make; to be content with what I say—that I have relinquished the Russian mission because I have no choice but to do so.'

He spoke firmly, because he spoke only the truth, although not all the truth.

A great anger rose up in her, the first that she had ever been moved to by him. All the pride of her temper and all her dignity were outraged by this refusal to have confidence in her. It seemed incredible to her. She still thought herself the prey of some dream, of some hallucination. Her lips parted to speak, but again she withheld the words she was about to utter. Her strong justice compelled her to admit that he was but within his rights, and her sense of duty was stronger than her sense of self-love.

She did not look at him, nor could she trust her voice. She turned from him without a syllable, and left the room. She was afraid of the violence of the anger that she felt.

'If it had been only to myself I would pardon it,' she thought; 'but an insult to my people, to my country, to my sovereign!—an insult without excuse, or explanation, or apology——'

She shut herself alone within her oratory and passed the most bitter hour of her life. The imperious and violent temper of the Szalras was dormant in her character, though she had chastened and tamed it, and the natural sweetness and serenity of her disposition had been a counterpoise to it so strong that the latter had become the only thing visible in her. But all the wrath of her race was now aroused and in arms against what she loved best on earth.

'If it had been anything else,' she thought; 'but a public act like this—an ingratitude to the Crown itself! A caprice for all the world to chatter of and blame!'

It would have been hard enough to bear, difficult enough to explain away to others, if he had told her his reasons, however captious, unwise, or selfish they might be; but to have the door of his soul thus shut upon her, his thoughts thus closed to her, hurt her with intolerable pain, and filled her with a deep and burning indignation.

She passed all the early morning hours alone in her little temple of prayer, striving in vain against the bitterness of her heart; above her the great ivory Crucifixion, the work of Angermayer, beneath which so many generations of the women of the House of Szalras had knelt in their hours of tribulation or bereavement.

When she left the oratory she had conquered herself. Though she could not extinguish the human passions that smarted and throbbed within her, she knew her duty well enough to know that it must lie in submission and in silence.

She sought for him at once. She found him in the library: he was playing to himself a long dreamy concerto of Schubert's, to soothe the irritation of his own nerves and pass away a time of keen suspense. He rose as she came into the room, and awaited her approach with a timid anxiety in his eyes, which she was too absorbed by her own emotions to observe. He had assumed a boldness that he had not, and had used his power to dominate her rather in desperation than in any sense of actual mastery. In his heart it was he who feared her.

'You were quite right,' she said simply to him. 'Of course, you are master of your own actions, and owe no account of them to me. We will say no more about it. For myself, you know I am content enough to escape exile to any embassy.'

He kissed her hand with an unfeigned reverence and humility.

'You are as merciful as you are great,' he murmured. 'If I be silent it is my misfortune.' He paused abruptly.

A sudden thought came over her as he spoke.

'It is some State secret that he knows and cannot speak of, and that has made him unwilling to go. Why did I never think of that before?'

An explanation that had its root in honour, a reticence that sprang from conscience, were so welcome to her, and to her appeared so natural, that they now consoled her at once, and healed the wounds to her own pride.

'Of course, if it be so, he is right not to speak even to me,' she mused; and her only desire was now to save him from the insistence and the indignation of the Princess, and the examination which these were sure to entail upon him when he should meet her at the noon breakfast now at hand.

To that end she sought out her aunt in her own apartments, taking with her the tiny Ottilie, who always disarmed all irritation in her godmother by the mere presence of her little flower-like face.

'Dear mother,' she said softly, when the child had made her morning obeisance, 'I am come to ask of you a great favour and kindness to me. Réné returned last night. He has done what he thought right. I do not even ask his reasons. He has acted from *force majeure* by dictate of his own honour. Will you do as I mean to do? Will you spare him any interrogation? I shall be so grateful to you, and so will he.'

Mdme. Ottilie, opening her bonbonnière for her namesake, drew up her fragile figure with a severity unusual to her.

'Do I hear you aright? You do not even know the reasons of

the insult M. de Sabran has passed upon the Crown and Cabinet, and you do not even mean to ask them ?'

'I do mean that; and what I do not ask I feel sure you will admit no one else has any right to ask of him.'

'No one certainly except His Majesty.'

'I presume His Majesty has had all information due to him as our Imperial master. All I entreat of you, dearest mother, is to do as I have done; assume, as we are bound to assume, that Réné has acted wisely and rightly, and not weary him with questions to which it will be painful for him not to respond.'

'Questions! I never yet indulged in anything so vulgar as curiosity, that you should imagine I shall be capable of subjecting your husband to a cross-examination. If you be satisfied, I can have no right to be more exacting than yourself. The occurrence is to me lamentable, inexcusable, unintelligible; but if explanation be not offered me you may rest assured I shall not intrude my request for it.'

'Of that I am sure; but I am not contented only with that. I want you to feel no dissatisfaction, no doubt, no anger against him. You may be sure that he has acted from conviction, because he was most desirous to go to Russia, as you saw when you urged him to accept the mission.'

'I have said the utmost that I can say,' replied the Princess, with a chill light in her blue eyes. 'This little child is no more likely to ask questions than I am, after what you have stated. But you must not regard my silence as any condonation of what must always appear to me a step disrespectful to the Crown, contrary to all usages of etiquette, and injurious to his own future and that of his children. His scruples of conscience came too late.'

'I did not say they were exactly that. I believe he learned something which made him consider that his honour required him to withdraw.'

'That may be,' said the Princess, frigidly. 'As I observed, it came lamentably late. You will excuse me if I breakfast in my own rooms this morning.'

Wanda left her, gave the child to a nurse who waited without, and returned to the library. She had offended and pained Mdme. Ottilie, but she had saved her husband from annoyance. She knew that though the Princess was by no means as free from curiosity as she declared herself, she was too high-bred and too proud to solicit a confidence withheld from her.

Sabran was seated at the piano where she had left him, but his forehead rested on the woodwork of it, and his whole attitude was suggestive of sad and absorbed thought and abandonment to regrets that were unavailing.

'It has cost him so much,' she reflected as she looked at him. 'Perhaps it has been a self-sacrifice, a heroism even; and I, from

mere wounded feeling, have been angered against him and almost cruel!'

With the exaggeration in self-censure of all generous natures, she was full of remorse at having added any pain to the disappointment which had been his portion; a disappointment none the less poignant, as she saw, because it had been voluntarily, as she imagined, accepted.

As he heard her approach he started and rose, and the expression of his face startled her for a moment; it was so full of pain, of melancholy, almost (could she have believed it) of despair. What could this matter be to affect him thus, since being of the State it could be at its worst only some painful and compromising secret of political life which could have no personal meaning for him? It was surely impossible that mere disappointment—a disappointment self-inflicted—could bring upon him such suffering? But she threw these thoughts away. In her great loyalty she had told herself that she must not even think of this thing, lest she should let it come between them once again and tempt her from her duty and obedience. Her trust in him was perfect.

The abandonment of a coveted distinction was in itself a bitter disappointment, but it seemed to him as nothing beside the sense of submission and obedience compelled from him to Vàsàrhely. He felt as though an iron hand, invisible, weighed on his life, and forced it into subjection. When he had almost grown secure that his enemy's knowledge was a buried harmless thing, it had risen and barred his way, speaking with an authority which it was not possible to disobey. With all his errors he was a man of high courage, who had always held his own with all men. Now the old forgotten humiliation of his earliest years revived, and enforced from him the servile timidity of the Slav blood which he had abjured. He had never for an instant conceived it possible to disregard the mandate he received; that an apparently voluntary resignation was permitted to him was, his conscience acknowledged, more mercy than he could have expected. That Vàsàrhely would act thus had not occurred to him; but before the act he could not do otherwise than admit of its justice, and obey.

But the consciousness of that superior will compelling him, left in him a chill tremor of constant fear, of perpetual self-abasement. What was natural to him was the reckless daring which many Russians, such as Skobeleff, have shown in a thousand ways of peril. He was here forced only to crouch and to submit; it was more galling, more cruel to him than utter exposure would have been. The sense of coercion was always upon him like a dragging chain. It produced on him a despondency, which not even the presence of his wife, or the elasticity of his own nature, could dispel.

He had to play a part to her, and to do this was unfamiliar and hateful to him. In all the years before he had concealed a

fact from her, but he had never been otherwise false. Though to his knowledge there had been always between them the shadow of a secret untold, there had never been any sense upon him of obligation to measure his words, to feign sentiments he had not, to hide behind a carefully constructed screen of untruth. Now, though he had indeed not lied with his lips, he had to sustain a concealment which was a thousand times more trying to him than that concealment of his birth and station to which he had been so long accustomed that he hardly realised it as any error. The very nobility with which she had accepted his silence, and given it, unasked, a worthy construction, smote him with a deeper sense of shame than even that which galled him when he remembered the yoke laid on him by the will of Egon Vàsàrhely.

He roused himself to meet her with composure.

She rested her hand caressingly on his.

'We will never speak of Russia any more. I should be sorry were the Kaiser to think you capricious or disloyal, but you have too much ability to have incurred this risk. Let it all be as though there had never arisen any question of public life for you. I have explained to Aunt Ottilie; she will not weary you with interrogation; she understands that you have acted as your honour bade you. That is enough for those who love you as do she and I.'

Every word she spoke entered his very soul with the cruellest irony, the sharpest reproach. But of these he let her see nothing. Yet he was none the less abjectly ashamed, less passionately self-condemned, because he had to consume his pain in silence, and had the self-control to answer, still with a smile, as he touched a chord or two of music:

'When the Israelites were free they hankered after the flesh-pots of Egypt. They deserved eternal exile, eternal bondage. So do I, for having ever been ingrate enough to dream of leaving Hohenszalras for the world of men!'

Then he turned wholly towards the Erard keyboard, and with splendour and might there rolled forth under his touch the military march of Rákóczi: he was glad of the majesty and passion of the music which supplanted and silenced speech.

'That is very grand,' she said, when the last notes had died away. 'One seems to hear the *Eljén*! of the whole nation in it. But play me something more tender, more pathetic—some *lieder* half sorrow and half gladness, you know so many of all countries.'

He paused a moment; then his hands wandered lightly across the notes, and called up the mournful folk-songs that he had heard so long, so long, before; songs of the Russian peasants, of the maidens borne off by the Tartar in war, of the blue-eyed children carried away to be slaves, of the homeless villagers beholding their straw-roofed huts licked up by the hungry hurrying flame lit by the Kossack or the Kurd; songs of a people without joy, that he

had heard in his childish days, when the great rafts had drifted slowly down the Volga water, and across the plains the lines of chained prisoners had crept as slowly through the dust; or songs that he had sung to himself, not knowing why, where the winter was white on all the land, and the bay of the famished wolves afar off had blent with the shrill sad cry of the wild swans dying of cold and of hunger and of thirst on the frozen rivers, and the reeds were grown hard as spears of iron, and the waves were changed to stone.

The intense melancholy penetrated her very heart. She listened with the tears in her eyes, and her whole being stirred and thrilled by a pain not her own. A kind of consciousness came to her, borne on that melancholy melody, of some unspoken sorrow which lived in this heart which beat so near her own, and whose every throb she had thought she knew. A sudden terror seized her lest all this while she who believed his whole life hers was in truth a stranger to his deepest grief, his dearest memories.

When the last sigh of those plaintive songs without words had died away, she signed to him to approach her.

'Tell me,' she said very gently, 'tell me the truth. Réné, did you ever care for any woman, dead or lost, more than, or as much as, you care for me? I do not ask you if you loved others. I know all men have many caprices, but was any one of them so dear to you that you regret her still? Tell me the truth; I will be strong to bear it.'

He, relieved beyond expression that she but asked him that on which his conscience was clear and his answer could be wholly sincere, sat down at her feet and leaned his head against her knee.

'Never, so hear me God!' he said simply. 'I have loved no woman as I love you.'

'And there is not one that you regret?'

'There is not one.'

'Then what is it that you do regret? Something more weighs on you than the mere loss of diplomatic life, which, after all, to you is no more than the loss of a toy to Bela.'

'If I do regret,' he said, with a smile, 'it is foolish and thankless. The happiness you give me here is worth all the fret and fever of the world's ambitions. You are so great and good to be so little angered with me for my reticence. All my life, such as it is, shall be dedicated to my gratitude.'

Once more an impulse to tell her all passed over him—a sense that he might trust her absolutely for all tenderness and all pity came upon him; but with the weakness which so constantly holds back human souls from their own deliverance, his courage once again failed him. He once more looking at her thought: 'Nay! I dare not. She would never understand, she would never pardon, she would never listen. At the first word she would abhor me.'

He did not dare; he bent his face down on her knees as any child might have done.

'What I ever must regret is not to be worthy of you!' he murmured; and the subterfuge was also a truth.

She looked down at him wistfully with doubt and confusion mingled. She sighed, for she understood that buried in his heart there was some pain he would not share, perchance some half involuntary unfaithfulness he did not dare confess. She thrust this latter thought away quickly; it hurt her as the touch of a hot iron hurts tender flesh; she would not harbour it. It might well be, she knew.

She was silent some little time, then she said calmly:

'I think you worthy. Is not that enough? Never say to me what you do not wish to say. But—but—if there be anything you believe that I should blame, be sure of this, love: I am no fair-weather friend. Try me in deep water, in dark storm!'

And still he did not speak.

His evil angel held him back and said to him, 'Nay! she would never forgive.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

One day in this winter time she sat alone in her octagon room whilst he was out driving in the teeth of a strong wind blowing from the north and frequent bursts of snowstorm. Rapid exercise, eager movements, were necessary to him at once as tonic and as anodyne, and the northern blood that was in him made the bitter cold, the keen and angry air, the conflict with the frantic horses tearing at their curbs welcome and wholesome to him. Paul Zabaroff had many a day driven so over the hard snows of Russian plains.

She sat at home as the twilight drew on, her feet buried in the furs before her chair, the fragrance shed about her from a basket of forced narcissus and bowls full of orange flowers and of violets, the light of the burning wood shining on the variegated and mellow hues of the tiles of the hearth. The last poems of Coppée were on her lap, but her thoughts had wandered away from those to Sabran, to her children, to a thousand happy trifles connected with one or the other. She was dreaming idly in that vague reverie which suits the last hour of the declining day in the grey still winter of a mountain-land. She was almost sorry when Hubert entered and brought her the mail-bag, which had just come through the gloomy defiles and the frosted woods which stretched between them and Matrey.

'It grows late,' she said to him. 'I fear it will be a stormy night. Have you heard the Marquis return?'

He told her that Sabran had not yet driven in, and ventured to add his hope that his master would not be out long; then he asked if she desired the lamps lit, and on being told she did not, withdrew, leaving the leather bag on a table close to one of the Saxe bowls of violets. There was plenty of light from the fire, and even from the windows, to read her letters by; she went first to one of the casements and looked at the night, which was growing very wild and dark. Though day still lingered, she could hear the wind go screaming down the lake, and the rush of the swollen water swirling against the terrace buttresses below. All beyond, woods, hills, mountains, were invisible under the grey mist.

'I hope he will not be late,' she thought, but she was too keen a mountaineer to be apprehensive. Sabran now knew every road and path through all the Tauern as well as she did. She returned to her seat and unlocked the leather bag; there were several newspapers, two letters for the Princess, three or four for Sabran, and one only for herself. She laid his aside for him, sent those of the Princess to her room, and opened her own. The writing of it she did not recognise; it was anonymous, and was very brief.

'If you wish to know why the Marquis de Sabran did not go to Russia, ask Egon Vàsàrhely.'

That was all: so asps are little.

She sat quite still, and felt as if a bolt had fallen on her from the leaden skies without. Vàsàrhely knew, the writer of the letter knew, and she—*she*—did not know! That was her first distinct thought.

If Sabran had entered the room at that instant she would have held to him this letter, and would have said, 'I ask you, not him.' He was absent, and she sat motionless, keeping the unsigned note in her hand, and staring down on it. Then she turned and looked at the post-mark. It was 'Vienna.' A city of a million souls! What clue to the writer was there? She read it again and again, as even the wisest will read such poisonous things, as though by repeated study that mystery would be compelled to stand out clearly revealed. It did not say enough to have been the mere invention of the sender: it was not worded as an insinuation, but as a fact. For that reason it took a hold upon her mind which would at once have rejected a fouler or a darker suggestion. Although free from any baseness of suspicion there was yet that in the name of her cousin, in juxtaposition with her husband's, which could not do otherwise than startle and carry with it a corroboration of the statement made. A wave of the deep anger which had moved her on her husband's first refusal swept over her again. Her hand clenched, her eyes flashed, where she sat alone in the gathering shadows.

There came a sound at the door of the room and a small golden head came from behind the tapestry.

'May we come in?' said Bela. It was the children's hour.

She rose, and put him backward.

'Not now, my darling; I am occupied. Go away for a little while.'

The women who were with them took the children back to their apartments. She sat down with the note still in her hand. What could it mean? No good thing was ever said thus. She pondered long, and was unable to imagine any sense or meaning it could have, though all the while memories thronged upon her of words, and looks, and many trifles which had told her of the enmity that was existent between her cousin and Sabran. That she saw; but there her knowledge ceased, her vision failed. She could go no farther, conjecture nothing more.

'Ask Egon!' Did they think she would ask him or any living being that which Sabran had refused to confide in her? Whoever wrote this knew her little, she thought. Perhaps there were women who would have done so. She was not one of them.

With a sudden impulse of scorn she cast the sheet of paper into the fire before her. Then she went to her writing-table and enclosed the envelope in another, which she addressed to her lawyers in Salzburg. She wrote with it: 'This is the cover to an anonymous letter which I have received. Try your uttermost to discover the sender.'

Then she sat down again and thought long, and wearily, and vainly. She could make nothing of it. She could see no more than a wayfarer whom a blank wall faces as he goes. The violets and orange blossoms were close at her elbow; she never in after time smelt their perfume without a sick memory of the stunned, stupefied bewilderment of that hour.

The door unclosed again, a voice again spoke behind as a hand drew back the folds of the tapestry.

'What, are you in darkness here? I am very cold. Have you no tea for me?' said Sabran, as he entered, his eyes brilliant, his cheeks warm, from the long gallop against the wind. He had changed his clothes, and wore a loose suit of velvet; the servants, entering behind him, lit the candelabra, and brought in the lamps; warmth, and gladness, and light seemed to come with him; she looked up and thought, 'Ah! what does anything matter? He is home in safety!'

The impulse to ask of him what she had been bidden to ask of Egon Vàsàrhely had passed with the intense surprise of the first moment. She could not ask of him what she had promised never to seek to know; she could not re-open a long-closed wound. But neither could she forget the letter lying burnt there amongst the flames of the wood. He noticed that her usual perfect calm was broken as she welcomed him, gave him his letters, and bade the

servants bring tea; but he thought it mere anxiety, and his belated drive; and being tired with a pleasant fatigue which made rest sweet, he stretched his limbs out on a low couch beside the hearth, and gave himself up to that delicious dreamy sense of *bien-être* which a beautiful woman, a beautiful room, tempered warmth and light, and welcome repose, bring to any man after some hours' effort and exposure in wild weather and intense cold and increasing darkness.

'I almost began to think I should not see you to-night,' he said happily, as he took from her hand the little cup of Frankenthal china which sparkled like a jewel in the light. 'I had fairly lost my way, and Josef knew it no better than I; the snow fell with incredible rapidity, and it seemed to grow night in an instant. I let the horses take their road, and they brought us home; but if there be any poor pedlars or carriers on the hills to-night I fear they will go to their last sleep.'

She shuddered and looked at him with dim, fond eyes. 'He is here; he is mine,' she thought; 'what else matters?'

Sabran stretched out his fingers and took some of the violets from the Saxe bowl and fastened them in his coat as he went on speaking of the weather, of the perils of the roads whose tracks were obliterated, and of the prowess and intelligence of his horses, that had found the way home when he and his groom, a man born and bred in the Tauern, had both been utterly at a loss. The octagon room had never looked lovelier and gayer to him, and his wife had never looked more beautiful than both did now as he came to them out of the darkness and the snowstorm and the anxiety of the last hour.

'Do not run those risks,' she murmured. 'You know all that your life is to me.'

The letter which lay burnt in the fire, and the dusky night of ice and wind without, had made him dearer to her than ever. And yet the startled, shocked sense of some mystery, of some evil, was heavy upon her, and did not leave her that evening nor for many a day after.

'You are not well?' he said to her anxiously later, as they left the dinner-table.

She answered evasively.

'You know I am not always quite well now. It is nothing. It will pass.'

'I was wrong to alarm you by being out so late in such weather,' he said, with self-reproach. 'I will go out earlier in future.'

'Do not wear those violets,' she said, with a trivial caprice wholly unlike her, as she took them from his coat. 'They are Bonapartist emblems—*fleurs de malheur*.'

He smiled, but he was surprised, for he had never seen in her any one of those fanciful whims and vagaries that are common to women.

'Give me any others instead,' he said; 'I wear but your symbol, O my lady!'

She took some myrtle and lilies of the valley from one of the large porcelain jars in the Rittersäal.

'These are our flowers,' she said, as she gave them to him. 'They mean love and peace.'

He turned from her slightly as he fastened them where the others had been.

All the evening she was preoccupied and nervous. She could not forget the intimation she had received. It was intolerable to her to have anything of which she could not speak to her husband. Though they had their own affairs apart one from the other, there had been nothing of moment in hers that she had ever concealed from him. But here it was impossible for her to speak to him, since she had pledged herself never to seek to know the reason of an action which, however plausibly she explained it to herself, remained practically inexplicable and unintelligible. It was terrible to her, too, to feel that the lines of a coward who dared not sign them had sunk so deeply into her mind that she did not question their veracity. They had at once carried conviction to her that Egon Vàsàrhely did know what they said he did. She could not have told why this was, but it was so. It was what hurt her most—others knew; she did not.

She felt that if she could have spoken to Sabran of it, the matter would have become wholly indifferent to her; but the obligation of reticence, the sense of separation which it involved, oppressed her greatly. She was also haunted by the memory of the enmity which existed between these men, whose names were so strangely coupled in the anonymous counsel given her.

She stayed long in her oratory that night, seeking vainly for calmness and patience under this temptation; seeking beyond all things for strength to put the poison of it wholly from her mind. She dreaded lest it should render her irritable and suspicious. She reproached herself for having been guilty of even so much insinuation of rebuke to him as her words with the flower had carried in them. She had ideas of the duties of a woman to her husband widely different to those which prevail in the world. She allowed herself neither irritation nor irony against him. 'When the thoughts rebel, the acts soon revolt,' she was wont to say to herself, and even in her thoughts she would never blame him.

Prayer, even if it have no other issue or effect, rarely fails to tranquillise and fortify the heart which is lifted up ever so vaguely in search of a superhuman aid. She left her oratory strengthened and calmed, resolved in no way to allow such partial success to their unknown foe as would be given if the treacherous warning brought any suspicion or bitterness to her mind. She passed through the open archway in the wall which divided his rooms from hers, and looked at him where he lay already asleep upon his

bed, early fatigued by the long cold drive from which he had returned at nightfall. He was never more handsome than sleeping calmly thus, with the mellow light of a distant lamp reaching the fairness of his face. She looked at him with all her heart in her eyes; then stooped and kissed him without awaking him.

'Ah! my love,' she thought, 'what should ever come between us? Hardly even death, I think, for if I lost you I should not live long without you.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Salzburg lawyers employed all the resources of the Viennese police to discover the sender of the envelope, but vainly; nothing was learned by all the efforts made. But the letter constantly haunted her thoughts. It produced in her an uneasiness and an apprehensiveness wholly foreign to her temper. The impossibility also of saying anything about it increased the weight of it on her memory. Yet she never once thought of asking Vàsàrhely. She wrote to him now and then, as she had always done, to give him tidings of her health or of her movements, but she never once alluded in the most distant terms to the anonymous information she had received. If he had been there beside her she would not have spoken of it. Of the two, she would sooner have reopened the subject to her husband. But she never did so. She had promised him to be silent, and to her creed a promise was inviolate, never to be retracted, be the pressure or the desire to do so what it would.

It was these grand lines on which her character and her habits were cast that awed him, and made him afraid to tell her his true history. Had he revered her less he would probably have deceived her less. Had she been of a less noble temperament she would also probably have been much less easy to deceive.

Her health was at this time languid, and more uncertain than usual, and the two lines of the letter were often present to her thoughts, tormenting her with idle conjecture, painful doubt, none the less painful because it could take no definite shape. Sometimes when she was not well enough to accompany him out of doors or drive her own sleigh through the keen clear winter air, she sat doing nothing, and thinking only of this thing, in the same room, with the same smell of violets about her, musing on what it might by any possibility mean. Any secret was safe with Egon, but then since the anonymous writer was in possession of it the secret was not only his. She wondered sometimes in terror whether it could be anything that might in after years affect her children's future, and then as rapidly discarded the bare thought as

so much dishonour to their father. 'It is only because I am now nervous and impressionable,' she said to herself, 'that this folly takes such a hold upon me. When I am well again I shall not think of it. Who is it says of anonymous letters that they are like "*les immondices des rues: il faut boucher le nez, tourner la tête et passer outre*"?'

But '*les immondices*' spoiled the odours of the new year violets to her.

In the early spring of the year she gave birth to another son. She suffered more than she had ever done before, and recovered less quickly. The child was like all the others, fair, vigorous, and full of health. She wished to give him her husband's name, but Sabran so strenuously opposed the idea that she yielded, and named him after her brother Victor, who had fallen at Magenta.

There were the usual rejoicings throughout the estates, rejoicings that were the outcome of genuine affection and fealty to the race of Szalras, whose hold on the people of the Tauern had resisted all the revolutionary movements of the earlier part of the century, and had fast root in the hearts of the staunch and conservative mountaineers. But for the first time as she heard the hearty '*Hoch*!' of the assembled peasantry echoing beneath her windows, and the salvos fired from the old culverins on the keep, a certain fear mingled with her maternal pride, and she thought: 'Will the people love them as well twenty years hence, fifty years hence, when I shall be no more? Will my memory be any shield to them? Will the traditions of our race outlast the devouring changes of the world?'

Meantime the Princess, happy and smiling, showed the little new-born noble to the stalwart chamois hunters, the comely farmers and fishermen, the clear-eyed stout-limbed shepherds and labourers gathered bareheaded round the Schloss.

Bela stood by contemplating the crowd he knew so well; he did not see why they should cheer any other child beside himself. He stood with his little velvet cap in his hand, because he was always told to do so, but he felt very inclined to put it on; if his father had not been present there he would have done so.

'If I have ever so many brothers,' he said at last thoughtfully to Greswold, who was by his side, 'it will not make any difference, will it? I shall always be *the* one?'

'What do you mean?' asked the physician.

'They will none of them be like me? They will none of them be as great as I am? Not if I have twenty?'

'You will be always the eldest son, of course,' said the old man, repressing a smile. 'Yes; you will be their head, their chief, their leading spirit; but for that reason you will have much more expected of you than will be expected of them; you will have to learn much more, and try to be always good. Do you follow me, Count Bela?'

Bela's little rosy mouth shut itself up contemptuously. 'I shall be always the eldest, and I shall do whatever I like. I do not see why they want any others than me.'

'You will not do always what you like, Count Bela.'

'Who shall prevent me?

'The law, which you will have to obey like every one else.'

'I shall make the laws when I am a little older,' said Bela. 'And they will be for my brothers and all the people, but not for me. I shall do what I like.'

'That will be very ungenerous,' said Greswold, quietly. 'Your mother, the Countess, is very different. She is stern to herself, and indulgent to all others. That is why she is beloved. If you will think of yourself so much when you are grown up, you will be hated.'

Bela flushed a little guiltily and angrily.

'That will not matter,' he said, sturdily. 'I shall please myself always.'

'And be unkind to your brothers?'

'Not if they do what I tell them; I will be very kind if they are good. Gela always does what I tell him,' he added after a little pause; 'I do not want any but Gela.'

'It is natural you should be fondest of Gela, as he is nearest your age, but you must love all the brothers you may have, or you will distress your mother very greatly.'

'Why does she want any but me?' said Bela, clinging to his sense of personal wrong. And he was not to be turned from that.

'She wants others besides you,' said the physician, adroitly, 'because to be happy she needs children who are tender-hearted, unselfish, and obedient. You are none of those things, my Count Bela, so Heaven sends her consolation.'

Bela opened his blue eyes very wide, and he coloured with mortification.

'She always loves me best!' he said haughtily. 'She always will!'

'That will depend on yourself, my little lord,' said Greswold, with a significance which was not lost on the quick intelligence of the child; and he never forgot this day when his brother Victor was shown to the people.

'There will be no lack of heirs to Hohenszalras,' said the Princess meanwhile to his father.

He thought as he heard:

'And if ever she know she can break her marriage like a rotten thread! Those boys can all be made as nameless as I was! Would she do it? Perhaps not, for the children's sake. God knows—she might change even to them; she might hate them as she loves them now, because they are mine.'

Even as he sat beside her couch with her hand in his these

thoughts pursued and haunted him. Remorse and fear consumed him. When she looked at the blue eyes of her new-born son, and said to him with a happy smile: 'He will be just as much like you as the others are,' he could only think with a burning sense of shame, 'Like me! like a traitor! like a liar! like a thief!'—and the faces of these children seemed to him like those of avenging angels.

He thought with irrepressible agony of the fact that her country's laws would divorce her from him if she chose, did ever the truth come to her ear. He had always known this indeed, as he had known all the other risks he ran in doing what he did. But it had been far away, indistinct, unasserted; whenever the memory of it had passed over him he had thrust it away. Now when another knew his secret, he could not do so. He had a strange sensation of having fallen from some great height; of having all his life slide away like melting ice out of his hands. He never once doubted for an instant the good faith of Egon Vàsàrhely. He knew that his lips would no more unclose to tell his secret than the glaciers yonder would find human voice. But the consciousness that one man lived, moved, breathed, rose with each day, and went amongst other men, bearing with him that fatal knowledge, made it now impossible for himself ever to forget it. A dull remorse, a sharp apprehension, were for ever his companions, and never left him for long even in his sweetest hours. He did justice to the magnificent generosity of the one who spared him. Egon Vàsàrhely knew, as he knew, that she, hearing the truth, could annul the marriage if she chose. His children would have no rights, no name, if their mother chose to separate herself from him. The law would make her once more as free as though she had never wedded him. He knew that, and the other man who loved her knew it too. He could measure the force of Vàsàrhely's temptation as that simple and heroic soldier could not stoop to measure his.

He was deeply unhappy, but he concealed it from her. Even when his heart beat against hers it seemed to him always that there was an invisible wall between himself and her. He longed to tell the whole truth to her, but he was afraid; if the whole pain and shame had been his own that the confession would have caused, he would have dared it; but he had not the heart to inflict on her such suffering, not the courage to destroy their happiness with his own hand. Egon Và-àrhely alone knew, and he for her sake would never speak. As for the reproach of his own conscience, as for the remorse that the words of his children might at any moment call up in him, these he must bear. He was a man of cool judgment and of ready resource, and though he had never foreseen the sharp repentance which his better nature now felt, he knew that he would be able to live it down as he had crushed out so many other scruples. He vowed to himself that as far as in him

lay he would atone for his act. The moral influence of his wife had not been without effect on him. Not altogether, but partially, he had grown to believe in what she believed in, of the duty of human life to other lives; he had not her sympathy for others, but he had admired it, and in his own way followed it, though without her faith.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Life went on in its old pathways at Hohenszalras. Nothing more was said by him, or to him, as to his rejection of the Russian mission. She was niggard in nothing, and when she offered her faith or pledged her silence, gave both entirely and ungrudgingly. Sabran to her showed an increase of devotion, an absolute adoration which would in themselves have sufficed to console any woman; and if the most observant member of their household, Greswold, perceived in him a preoccupation, a languor, a gloom, which boded ill for their future peace, the old man was too loyal in his attachment not to endeavour to shake off his own suspicions and discredit his own penetration.

The Princess had been favoured by a note from Olga Brancka, in which that lady wrote: 'Have you discovered the nature of his refusal of Russia? Myself, I believe that I was to blame. I hinted to him that he would be tempted to his old sins in St. Petersburg, and that Wanda would be very miserable there. It seems that this was enough for the tender heart of this devoted lover, and too much for his wisdom and his judgment; he rejected the mission after accepting it. I believe the Court is furious. I am not *de service* now, so that I have no opportunity of endeavouring to restore him to favour; but I imagine the Emperor will not quarrel for ever with the Hohenszalrasburg.

The letter restored him at least to the favour of Mdme. Ottilie. Exaggerated as such a scruple appeared it did not seem to her impossible in a man whose devotion to his wife she daily witnessed, shown in a hundred traits. She blamed him still severely in her own thoughts for what she held an inexcusable disrespect to the Crown, but she kept her word scrupulously and never spoke to him on the subject.

'Where else in the wide world would any man have found such forbearance?' he thought with gratitude, and he knew that nowhere would such delicate sentiment have existed outside the pale of that fine patrician dignity which is as incapable of the vulgarity of inquisitiveness and interrogation as was the Spartan of lament.

The months went by. They did not leave home; he seemed

to have lost all wish for any absence, and even repulsed the idea of inviting the usual house-parties of the year. She supposed that he was averse to meeting people who might recur to his rejection of the post he had once accepted. The summer passed and the autumn came; he spent his time in occasional sport, the keen and perilous sport of the Austrian mountains, and more often and more faithfully beguiled himself with those arts of which he was a brilliant master, though he would call himself no more than a mere amateur. From the administration of the estates he had altogether withdrawn himself.

'You are so much wiser than I,' he always said to her; and when she would have referred to him, replied: 'You have your lawyers; they are all honest men. Consult them rather than me.'

With the affairs of Idrac only he continued to concern himself a little, and was persistent in setting aside all its revenues to accumulate for his second son.

'I wish you cared more about all these things,' she said to him one day, when she had in her hand the reports from the mines of Galicia. He answered angrily, 'I have no right to them. They are not mine. If you chose to give them all away to the Crown I should say nothing.'

'Not even for the children's sake?'

'No: you would be entirely justified if you liked to give the children nothing.'

'I really do not understand you,' she said in great surprise.

'Everything is yours,' he said abruptly.

'And the children too, surely!' she said, with a smile: but the strangeness of the remark disquieted her. 'It is over-sensitiveness,' she thought; 'he can never altogether forget that he was poor. It is for that reason public life would have been so good for him; dignities which he enjoyed of his own, honours that he arrived at through his own attainments.'

Chagrined to have lost the opportunity of winning personal honours in a field congenial to him, the sense that everything was hers could hardly fail to gall him sometimes constantly, though she strove to efface any remembrance or reminder that it was so.

In the midsummer of that year, whilst they were quite alone, they were surprised by another letter from Mdme. Brancka, in which she proposed to take Hohenszalras on her way from France to Tsarköe Selo, where she was about to pay a visit which could not be declined by her.

When in the spring he had written with formality to her to announce the birth of his son Victor, she had answered with a witty coquettish reply such as might well have been provocative of further correspondence. But he had not taken up the invitation. Mortified and irritated, she had compared his writing with the piece of burnt paper, and been more satisfied than ever that he

had penned the name of Vassia Kazán. But even were it so, what, she wondered, had it to do with Russia? He and Egon Vàsàrhely were not friends so intimate that they had any common interests one with the other. The mystery had interested her intensely when her rapid intuition had connected the resignation of Sabran's appointment with the messenger sent to him from Taróc. Her impatience to be again in his presence grew intense. She imagined a thousand stories, to cast each aside in derision as impossible. All her suppositions were built upon no better basis than a fragment of charred paper; but her shrewd intuition bore her into the region of truth, though the actual truth of course never suggested itself to her even in her most fantastic and dramatic visions. Finally she thus proposed to visit Hohenszalias in the midsummer months.

'Last year you had such a crowd about you,' she wrote, 'that I positively saw nothing of you, *liebe* Wanda. You are alone now, and I venture to propose myself for a fortnight. You cannot exactly be said to be in the way to anywhere, but I shall make you so. When one is going to Russia, a matter of another five hundred miles or so is a bagatelle.'

'We must let her come,' said Wanda, as she gave the letter to Sabran, who, having read it, said with much sincerity:

'For heaven's sake, do not. A fortnight of Madame Olga! as well have—a century of "Madame Angot"!'

'Can I prevent her?'

'You can make some excuse. I do not like Mdme. Brancka.'

'Why?'

He hesitated; he could not tell her what he had felt at the ball of the Hofburg. 'She reminds me of a woman who drew me into a thousand follies, and to cap her good deeds betrayed me to the Prussians. If you must let her come I will go away. I will go and see your haras on the Pusztas.'

'Are you serious?'

'Quite serious. Were I not ashamed of such a weakness, I should use a feminine expression. I should say "*elle me donne des nerfs.*"'

'I think she has a great admiration for you, and she does not conceal it.'

'Merely because she is sensible that I do not like her. Such women as she are discontented if only one person fail to admit their charm. She is accustomed to admiration, and she is not scrupulous as to how she obtains it.'

'My dear! pray remember that she is our guest, and doubly our relative.'

'I will try and remember it; but, believe me, all honour is wholly wasted upon Mdme. Olga. You offer her a coin of which the person and the superscription are alike unknown to her.'

'You are very severe,' said his wife.

She looked at him, and perceived that he was not jesting, that he was on the contrary disturbed and annoyed, and she remembered the persistence with which Olga Brancka had sought his companionship and accompanied him on his sport in the summer of her visit there.

'If she had not married first my brother and then my cousin, she would never have been an intimate friend of mine,' she continued. 'She is of a world wholly opposed to all my tastes. For you to be absent, if she came, would be too marked, I think; but we can both leave, if you like. I am well enough for any movement now, and I can leave the child with his nurse. Shall we make a tour in Hungary? The haras will interest you. There are the mines, too, that one ought to visit.'

He received her assent with gratitude and delight. He felt that he would have gone to the uttermost ends of the earth rather than run the risk of spending long lonely summer days in the excitation of Mdme. Brancka's presence. He detested her, he would always detest her; and yet when he shut his eyes he saw her so clearly, with the malicious light in her dusky glance, and the jewelled butterfly trembling about her breasts.

'She shall never come under Wanda's roof if I can prevent it,' he thought, remembering her as she had been that night.

A few days later the Countess Brancka, much to her rage, had a note from the Hohenszlrasburg, which said that they were on the point of leaving for Hungary and Galicia, but that if she would come there in their absence, the Princess Ottilie, who remained, would be charmed to receive her. Of course she excused herself, and did not go. A visit to the solitudes of the Iselthal, where she would see no one but a lady of eighty years old and four little children, had few attractions for the adventurous and vivacious wife of Stefan Brancka.

'It is only Wanda's jealousy,' she thought, and was furious; but she looked at herself in the mirror, and was almost consoled as she thought also, 'He avoids me. Therefore he is afraid of me!'

She went to her god, *le monde*, and worshipped at all its shrines and in all its fashions; but in the midst of the turmoil and the triumphs, the worries and the intoxications of her life, she did not lose her hold on her purpose, nor forget that he had slighted her. His beautiful face, serene and scornful, was always before her. He might have been at her feet, and he chose to dwell beside his wife under those solitary forests, amongst those solitary mountains of the High Tauern!

'With a woman he has lived with all these eight years!' she thought, with furious impatience. 'With a woman who has grafted the Lady of La Garaye on Libussa, who never gives him a moment's jealousy, who is as flawless as an ivory statue or a marble throne, who suckles her children and could spin their

clothes if she wanted, who never cares to go outside the hills of her own home—the Teuton *Hausfrau* to her finger-tips.' And she was all the more bitter and the more angered because, always as she tried to think thus, the image of Wanda rose up before her, as she had seen her so often at Vienna or Hohenszalras, with the great pearls on her hair and on her breast.

> 'A planet at whose passing, lo!
> All lesser stars recede, and night
> Grows clear as day thus lighted up
> By all her loveliness, which burns
> With pure white flame of chastity;
> And fires of fair thought. . . .'

CHAPTER XXIX.

When they came home from their tour amidst the mines of Galicia and the plains of Hungary, and from their reception amongst the adoring townsfolk of restored Idrac, the autumn was far advanced, and the long rains and the wild winds of October had risen, making of every brook a torrent.

On their return she found intelligence from Paris that a friend of her father's, and her own godfather, the Duc de Noira, had died, bequeathing her his gallery of pictures, and his art collection of the eighteenth century, which were both famous. The Duc had been a Legitimist and a hermit. He had been unmarried, and had spent all the latter years of his life in amassing treasures of art, for which he had no heir of his own blood to care a jot. The bequest was a very precious one, and her presence in Paris was requested. Regretful for herself to leave Hohenszalras, she perceived that to Sabran the tidings were welcome. Moved by an unselfish impulse she said at once:

'Go alone; go instead of me; your presence will be the same as mine. Paris will amuse you more if you are by yourself, and you will be so happy amongst all those Lancrets and Fragonards, those Reiseiners and Gauthières. The collection is a marvel, but entirely of the Beau Siècle. You never saw it? No! I think the Duc never opened his doors to any one save to half a dozen old tried friends, and he had a horror of turning his *salons* into showrooms. If you think well, we will leave it all as it is, buying the house if we can. All that eighteenth-century *bibeloterie* would not suit this place, and I should like to keep it all as he kept it; that is the only true respect to show to a legacy.'

Sabran hesitated; he was tempted, yet he was half reluctant to yield to the temptation. He felt that he would willingly be by himself awhile, yet he loved his wife too passionately to quit her without pain. His own conscience made her presence at times

oppress and trouble him, yet he had never lost the half-religious adoration with which she had first inspired him. He suggested a compromise—why should they not winter in Paris?

She was about to dissent, for of all seasons in the Tauern she loved the winter best; but when she looked at him she saw such eager anticipation on his face that she suppressed her own wishes unuttered.

'We will go, if you like,' she said, without any hesitation or reluctance visible. 'I dare say we can find some pretty house. Aunt Ottilie will be pleased; there is nothing here which cannot do without us for a time, we have such trusty stewards; only I think it would be more change for you if you went alone.'

'No!' he said; 'separation is a sort of death; do not let us tempt fate by it. Life is so short at its longest; it is ingratitude to lose an hour that we can spend together.'

'There was never such a lover since Petrarca,' she said, with a smile. 'Nay, you eclipse him; he was never tried by marriage.'

But though she jested at it, his great love for her seemed like a beautiful light about her life. What did his state-secret matter? What did it matter what cause had led him to avoid political life?—he loved her so well.

The following month they were in Paris, having found an hotel in the Boulevard St. Germain, standing in a great sunny garden; and when they were fairly installed there, the Princess and the children and the horses followed them, and their arrival made an event of great interest and importance in the city which of all others in the world it is hardest thus to impress.

The Countess von Szalras, a notability always, was celebrated just then as the inheritress of the coveted Noira collection, which it had been fondly hoped would have gone to the hammer; and Sabran, popular always, and not forgotten here, where most things and people are forgotten in a week, was courted, flattered, and welcomed by men and by women; and as he rode down the Allée des Acacias, or entered the Mirlitons, he felt himself at home. His beautiful wife, his beautiful children, his incomparable horses, his marvellous good fortune were the talk of all those who had already left their country-houses for the winter *rentrée*, and attained a publicity, beginning with the great Szalras pearls and ending with the babies' white donkeys, which was the greatest of all possible offences to her; she abhorred and contemned publicity with the sensitiveness of a delicate temper and the contempt of a scornful patrician.

To Sabran it was not so offensive; there was the Slav in him, which loved display, and was not ill-pleased by notoriety. All this admiration around them made him feel that his life after all had been a great success, that he had drawn prizes in the lottery of fate which all men envied him; it helped him to forget Egon Vàsàrhely. He had never so nearly felt affection for Bela as when

lines of men and women stood still to watch the handsome child gallop on his pony down the avenues of the Bois.

'Life is after all like baccara or billiards,' he said to himself. 'It is of no use winning unless there be a *galerie* to look on and applaud.'

And then he felt ashamed of the poorness and triviality of the thought, which was not one he would have expressed to his wife. That very morning, when she had read a long flattery of herself in a journal of fashion, she had cast the sheet from her with disgust on every line of her face.

'We are safe from *that*, at least, in the Iselthal,' she had said. 'Cannot you make them understand that we are not public artists to need *réclames*, nor yet sovereigns to be compelled to submit to the microscope? Is this the meaning of civilisation—to make privacy impossible, to oblige every one to live under a lens?'

He had affected to agree with her, but in his heart he had not done so. He liked the fumes of the incense. So did his child.

'They will put this in the papers!' said Bela, when the snow came and he had his sledge out for the first time with four little Hungarian ponies.

'That is the poison of cities!' said Wanda, as she heard him. 'Who can have been so foolish as to tell him of the papers?'

'Your heir, my dear, will never want for reporters of any flattery,' said his father. 'It is as well he should run the gauntlet of them early.'

Bela listened, and said to his brother a little later: 'I like Paris. Paris prints everything we do, and the people read the print, and then they want to see us.'

'What good is that?' said Gela. 'I like home. They all of them *know* us; they don't want to *see* us. That is much better.'

'No, it isn't,' said Bela. 'One drives all day long at home, and there is nothing but the trees; here the trees are all people, and the people talk of us, and the people want to *be* us.'

'But they love us at home,' said Gela.

'That does not matter,' said Bela with hauteur.

Wanda called the children to her.

'Bela,' she said gently, 'do you know that once, not so very long ago, there was a little boy here in Paris very much like you, with golden hair and velvet coat like yours, and he was called the Dauphin, and when he went out with his servants, as you do, the people envied him, and talked of him, and put in print what he did each day? The people wanted to *be* him, as you say, but they did not love him—poor little child!—because they envied him so. And in a very little while—a very, very little while—because it was envy and not love, they put the Dauphin in prison, and they cut off his golden hair, and gave him nothing but bread and water and filthy straw, and locked him up all alone till he died. That is the use of being envied in Paris—or anywhere else. Gela is right. It is better when people love us.'

The next day, as Bela drove in his sledge down the white avenues through the staring crowds, his little, fair face was very grave under its curls: he thought of the Dauphin.

When the weather opened, Wanda took him and his brother to Versailles and Trianon, and told them more of that saddest of all earthly histories of fallen greatness. Gela sobbed aloud; Bela was silent and grew pale.

'I hate Paris,' he said very slowly, as they went back to it in the red close of the wintry afternoon.

'Do not hate Paris. Do not hate anything or any one,' said his mother, softly; 'but love your own home and your own people, and be grateful for them.'

Bela lifted his little cap and made the sign of the Cross, as he did when he saw anything holy. 'I am the Dauphin at home,' he thought; and he felt the tears in his eyes, though he never would cry as Gela did.

So she gave them her simples as antidotes to the city's poison, and occupied herself with her children, with the poor around her, with the various details of her distant estates, and paid but little heed to that artificial world which, when she heeded it, offended and irritated her. To please Sabran she went to a few great houses and to the Opera, and gave many entertainments herself, happy that he was happy in it, but not otherwise interested in the life around her, or moved by the homage of it.

'It is much more my jewels than it is myself that they stare at,' she assured him, when he told her of the admiration which she elicited wherever she appeared. 'Believe me, if you put my pearls or my diamonds on Mdme. Chose or Baroness Niemand, they would gather and gaze quite as much.'

He laughed.

'Last night I think you wore no ornaments except a few tea-roses, and I saw them follow you just the same. It is very odd that you never seem to understand that you are a beautiful woman.'

'I am glad to be so in your eyes, if I never shall be in my own. As for that popularity of society, it never commended itself to me. It has too strong a savour of the mob.'

'When you are so proud to the world why are you so humble to me?'

She was silent a moment, then said:

'I think when one loves any other very much, one becomes for him altogether unlike what one is to the world. As for being proud, I have never fairly made out whether my pride is humility or my humility pride, and none of my confessors have ever been able to tell me. I assure you I have searched my heart in vain.'

A shadow passed over his face; he thought that there even would be pride enough to send him out for ever from her side if she knew——

One day she suggested to him that he should visit Romaris.

'Now you are near for so long a time, surely you should go,' she urged. 'It is not well never to see your poor people. The priest is a good man, indeed; but he cannot altogether make up for your absence.'

He answered with some irritation that they were not his people. All the land had been parcelled out, and nothing remained to the name of Sabran except a strip of the sea-shore and one old half-ruined tower: he could not see that he had any duties or obligations there. She did not insist, because she never pursued a theme which appeared unwelcome; but in herself she wondered at the dislike which was in him towards his Breton hamlet, wondered that he did not wish one of his sons to bear its title, wondered that he did not desire the children to see once, at least, the sea-nest of his forefathers. It was more effort to her than usual to restrain herself from pressing questions upon him. But she did forbear; and as a consolation to her conscience sent to the Curé of Romaris a sum of money for the poor, which was so large that it astounded and bewildered the holy man by the weight of responsibility it laid on him.

The indifference shocked her the more because of the profound conviction, in which she had been reared, of the duties of the noble to his poorer brethren, and the ties of mutual affection which bound together her and her people's interests.

'The weapon of our order against the Socialist is duty,' she had once said to him.

He, more sceptical, had told her that no weapon, not even that anointed one, can turn aside the devilish hate of envy. But she held to her creed, and strove to rear her children in its tenets. It always seemed to her that the Cross before which the fiend shrinks cowering in 'Faust' is but a symbol of the power of a noble life to force even hatred to its knees.

She did not care for this season in Paris, but she did not let him perceive any dissatisfaction in her. She made her own interests out of the arts and charity; she bought the Hotel Noira, and left everything as the Duc had left it; she found pleasure in intercourse with her royal exiled friends, and left her husband his own entire liberty of action.

'Are you never jealous?' said her royal friend to her once. 'He is so much liked—so much made love to—I wonder you are not jealous!'

'I?' she echoed: and it seemed to her friend as if in that one pronoun she had said volumes. 'Jealous!'

She repeated the word as she drove home alone that day, and almost wondered what it meant. Who could be to him what she was? Who could dethrone her from that 'great white throne' to which his adoration had raised her? If his senses ever strayed, his soul would never swerve from its loyalty.

When she reached home that afternoon she found a card, on which was written with a pencil, in German:

'So sorry not to find you. I am in Paris to see my doctor. Zdenka has taken my service at Court. I will come to you to-morrow.'

The card was Mdme. Brancka's.

CHAPTER XXX.

Sabran, that same afternoon, as he had walked down the Rue de la Paix, had been signalled and stopped by a pretty woman wrapped to the eyes in blue fox furs, who was being driven in a low carriage by Hungarian horses, glorious in silver chains and trappings.

'My dear Réné,' had cried Mdme. Olga, 'do you not know me that you compel me to flourish my parasol? Yes: I am come to Paris. My sister-in-law, Zdenka, will do my waiting. I wanted to consult my physician; I am very unwell, though you look so incredulous. So Wanda has all the Noira collection? What a fortunate woman she is! The eighteenth century is the least suited to her taste. She will heartily despise all those shepherdesses *en panier* and those smiling deities on lacquer. How could the Duc leave such frivolities to so serious a person? What is her doubled rose-leaf amidst all her good luck? She must have one. I suppose it is you? Well, you will find me at home in an hour. I am only a stone's throw from your hotel. Have you brought all the homespun virtues with you from Hohenszalras? I am afraid they will wither in the air of the boulevards. *Au revoir*!'

And then she had laughed again and kissed her finger-tips to him, and driven away wrapped up in her shining furs, and he was conscious of a stinging sense of excitement, annoyance, pleasure, and confusion, as if he had drunk some irritant and heady wine.

He had gone on to his clubs with an uneasy sense of something perilous and distasteful having come into his life, yet also with a consciousness of a certain zest added to the seductions of this his favourite city. He did not go to the Hotel Brancka in the next hour, and was sensible of having to exercise a certain control over himself to refrain from doing so.

'Did you know that Olga was in Paris?' she said, in some surprise, to him when they met in the evening.

'I believe she arrived this morning,' he answered, with a certain effort. 'I met her an hour or two ago. She came unexpectedly; she had not even told her servants to open her hotel.'

'Is Stefan with her?'

'I believe not.'

'But surely it is her term of waiting in Vienna?'

He gave a gesture of indifference.

'I believed it was. I think it was. She will be sure to write to you this evening, so she said. We cannot escape her, you see; she is our fate.'

'We can go back to Hohenszalras.'

'That would be too absurd. We cannot spend our lives running away from Mdme. Brancka. We have a hundred engagements here. Besides, your Noira affair is not one half settled as yet, and it is only now that Paris is really agreeable. We will go back in May, after Chantilly.'

'As you like,' she said, with a smile of ready acquiescence.

She was only there for his sake. She would not spoil his contentment by showing that she made a sacrifice. She was never really happy away from her mountains, but she did not wish him to suspect that.

The Hotel Brancka was a charming little temple of luxury, ordered after the last mode, and as *pimpant* as its mistress. It had cost enormous sums of money, and its walls had been painted by famous artists with fantastic and voluptuous subjects, which had not been paid for at the present.

In finance, indeed, she was much like a king of recent time, who never had any money to give, but always said to his mistresses, 'Order whatever you like; the Civil List will always pay my bills.' She had never any money, but she knew that her brother-in-law, like the king's ministers, would always pay her bills.

'One expects to hear the "Decamerone" read here,' said Wanda, with some disdain, as she glanced around her on her first visit.

'At Hohenszalras one would never dare to read anything but the "Imitationis Christi,"' said Mdme. Olga, with contempt of another sort.

The little hotel was but a few streets distance off their own grand and spacious residence, which had undergone scarcely any change since the days of Louis XV. They saw the Countess Brancka very often, could not choose but see her when she chose, and that was almost perpetually.

He had honestly, and even intensely, desired not to be subjected to her vicinity. But it was difficult to resist its seduction when she lived within a few yards of him, when she met him at every turn, when the changing scenes of society were, like those of a kaleidoscope, always composed of the same pieces. The closeness of her relationship to his wife made an avoidance of her, which would have been easy with a mere acquaintance, wholly out of possibility. She pleaded her 'poverty' very prettily, as a plea to borrow their riding-horses, use their boxes at the Opera and the Théâtre Français, and be constantly, under one pretext or

another, seeking their advice. Wanda, who knew the enormous extravagance of both the Branckas, and the inroads which their debts made on even the magnificent fortunes of Egon Vàsàrhely, had not as much patience as usual in her before these plaintive pretences.

'*Wanda me boude*,' said Mdme. Brancka, with touching reproachfulness, and sought a refuge and a confidant in the sympathy of Sabran, which was not given very cordially, yet could not be altogether refused. Not only were they in the same world, but she made a thousand claims on their friendship, on their relationship. Stefan Brancka was in Hungary. She wanted Sabran's advice about her horses, about her tradespeople, about her disputes with the artists who had decorated her house; she sent for him without ceremony, and, with insistence, made him ride with her, drive with her, dance with her, made him take her to see certain diversions which were not wholly fitted for a woman of her rank, and so rapidly and imperceptibly gained ascendency over him that before making any engagement he involuntarily paused to learn whether she had any claim on his time. It caused his wife the same vague impatience which she had felt when Olga Brancka had persisted in going out with him on hunting excursions at home. But she thrust away her observation of it as unworthy of her.

'If she tire him,' she thought, 'he will very soon put her aside.'

But he did not do so.

Once she said to him, with a little irony, 'You do not dislike Olga so very much now?' and to her surprise he coloured and answered quickly, 'I am not sure that I do not hate her.'

'She certainly does not hate you,' said Wanda, a little contemptuously.

'Who knows?' he said gloomily; 'who could ever be sure of anything with a woman like that?'

'Mutability has a charm for some persons,' said his wife, with an irritation for which she despised herself.

'Not for me,' said Sabran, quickly. 'My opinion of Mdme. Olga is precisely what it has always been.'

'Are you very sincere to her, then?' said Wanda, and as she spoke, regretted it. What was Olga Brancka that she should for a moment bring any shadow of dissension between them?

'Sincere!' he echoed, with a certain embarrassment. 'Who would she expect to be so? I told you once before that you pay her in a coin of which she could not decipher the superscription!'

Wanda smiled, but she was pained by his tone. 'You are not the first man, I suppose, who amuses himself with what he despises,' she answered. 'But I do not think it is a very noble sport, or a very healthy one. Forgive me, dear, if I seem to preach to you.'

'Preach on for ever, my beloved divine. You can never weary me,' said Sabran; and he stooped and kissed her.

She did not return his caress.

That day as she drove with the Princess in the Bois, Bela and Gela facing her, she saw him in the side alley riding with the Countess Brancka. A physical pain seemed to contract her heart for a moment.

'Olga is very *accaparante*,' said the Princess, perceiving them also. 'Not content with borrowing your Arabs, she must have your husband also as her cavalier.'

'If she amuse him I am her debtor,' said Wanda, very calmly.

'Amuse! Can a man who has lived with you be amused by her?'

'I am not amusing,' said his wife, with a smile which was not mirthful. 'Men are like Bela and Gela; they cannot always be serious.'

Then she told her coachman to leave the Bois and drive out into the country. She did not care to meet those riders at every turn in the avenues.

'My dear Réné,' said the Princess, when she happened to see him alone. 'Can you find no one in all Paris to divert yourself with except Stefan Brancka's wife? I thought you disliked her.'

Sabran hesitated.

'She is related to us,' he said, a little feebly. 'One sees her of necessity a hundred times a week.'

'For our misfortune,' said the Princess, sententiously. 'But she is not altogether friendless in Paris. Can she find no one but you to ride with her?'

'Has Wanda been complaining to you?'

'My dear Marquis,' replied Mdme. Ottilie, with dignity, 'your wife is not a person to complain; you must understand her singularly little after all, if you suppose that. But I think, if you would calculate the hours you have of late passed in Mdme. Brancka's society, you would be surprised to see how large a sum they make up of your time. It is not for me to presume to dictate to you; you are your own master, of course: only I do not think that Olga Brancka, whom I have known from her childhood, is worth a single half-hour's annoyance to Wanda.'

Sabran rose, and his lips parted to speak, but he hesitated what to say, and the Princess, who was not without tact, left him to receive herself some sisters of S. Vincent de Paul. His conscience was not wholly clear. He was conscious of a pungent, irresistible, even whilst undesired, attraction that this Russian woman possessed for him; it was something of the same potent yet detestable influence which Cochonette had exercised over him. Olga Brancka had the secret of amusing men and of exciting their baser natures; she had a trick of talk which sparkled like wine, and, without being actually wit, illumined and diverted her companions. She was a mistress of all the arts of provocation, and had a cruel power of making all scruples of conscience and all honesties and gravities

of purpose seem absurd. She made no disguise of her admiration of Sabran, and conveyed the sense of it in a thousand delicate and subtle modes of flattery. He read her very accurately, and had neither esteem nor regard for her, and yet she had an attraction for him. Her boudoir, all wadded softly with golden satin like a jewel-box, with its perpetual odour of roses and its faint light coloured like the roses, was a little temple of all the graces, in which men were neither wise nor calm. She had a power of turning their very souls inside out like a glove, and after she had done so they were never worth quite as much again. The fascination which Sabran possessed for her was that he never gave up his soul to her as the others did; he was always beyond her reach; she was always conscious that she was shut out from his inmost thoughts.

The sort of passion she had conceived for him grew, because it was fanned by many things—by his constancy to his wife, by his personal beauty, by her vague enmity to Wanda, by the sense of guilt and of indecency which would attach in the world's sight to such a passion. Her palate in pleasure was at once hardened and fastidious; it required strong food, and her audacity in search of it was not easily daunted. She knew, too, that he had some secret which his wife did not share; she was resolved to penetrate it. She had tried all other means; there only now remained one—to surprise or to beguile it from himself. To this end, cautious and patient as a cat, she had resumed her intimacy with them as relations, and, with all the delicate arts of which she was a proficient, strove to make her companionship agreeable and necessary to him. Before long he became sensible of a certain unwholesome charm in her society. He went with her to the Opera, he took her to pass hours amidst the Noira collection, he rode with her often; now and then he dined with her alone, or almost alone, in a small oval room of pure Japanese, where great silvery birds and white lilies seemed to float on a golden field, and the dishes were silver lotus leaves, and the lamps burned in pale green translucent gourds hanging on silver stalks.

An artificial woman is nothing without her *mise en scène*; transplanted amidst natural landscape and out-of-door life she is apt to become either ridiculous or tiresome. Mdme. Brancka in Paris was in her own playhouse; she looked well, and was in her own manner irresistible. At Hohenszalras she had been as out of keeping with all her atmosphere as her enamel buttons, her jewelled alpenstock, her cravat of pointe d'Alençon, and her softly-tinted cheeks had been out of place in the drenching rain-storms and mountain-winds of the Archduchy of Austria.

He knew very well that the attraction she possessed for him was of no higher sort than that which the theatre had; he seemed to be always present at a perfect comedy played with exquisite grace amidst unusually perfect decorations. But there was a cer-

tain artificial bias in his own temperament which made him at home there. His whole life after all had been an actor's. His wife had said rightly: 'Men cannot be always serious.' It was just his idler, falser moods which Olga Brancka suited, and his very fear of her gave a thrill of greater power to his amusement. When the Princess, his devoted friend, reproved him, he was unpleasantly aroused from his unwise indulgence in a perilous pursuit. To pain his wife would be to commit a monstrous crime, a crime of blackest ingratitude. He knew that; he was ever alive to the enormity of his debt to her, he was for ever dissatisfied with himself for being unable to become more worthy of her.

'She jealous!' he thought. It seemed to him impossible, yet his vanity could not repress a throb of exultation; it almost seemed to him that in making her more human it would make her more near his level. Jealous! It was not a word which was in any keeping with her; jealousy was a wild, coarse, undisciplined, suspicious passion, far removed from the calmness and the strength of her nature.

At that moment she entered the room, coming from a drive in the forenoon. It was still cold. She had a cloak of black sables reaching to her feet; it still rested on her shoulders. Her head was uncovered; she had never looked taller, fairer, more stately; the black furs seemed like some northern robes of coronation. Beneath them gleamed the great gold clasps of a belt, and gold lions' heads fastening her olive velvet gown.

'Jealous!' he thought, 'this queen amongst women!' His heart sank. 'She would never say anything,' he thought; 'she would leave me.' Almost he expected her to divine his thoughts. He was relieved when she spoke to him of some mere trifle of the day. Like many men he could not be frank, because frankness would have seemed like insult to his wife. He could not explain to her the mingled aversion and attraction which Olga Brancka possessed for him, the curious stinging irritation which she produced on his nerves and his senses, so that he despised her, disliked her, and yet could not wholly resist the charm of her unwholesome magic. How could he say this to his wife? How could he hope to make her understand, or if she understood, persuade her not to resent as the bitterest of affronts this power which another woman, and that woman nearly connected with her, possessed? Besides, even if he went so far, if he leaned so much on the nobility of her nature as to venture to do this, he knew very well that she would in reason say to him, 'Let us go away from where this danger exists.' He did not desire to go away. He was glad of this old life of pleasure, which let him forget his secret sorrow. Amidst the excitations of Paris he could push away the remembrance that another man knew the shame of his life. The calm and the solitude of Hohenszalras, which had been delightful to him once, had grown irksome when he had

begun to cling to them for fear lest any other should remember as Vàsàrhely had remembered. Here in Paris, where he had always been popular, admired, well known, he was as it were in his own kingdom, and the magnificence with which he could now live there brought him troops of friends. He hoped that his wife would not be unwilling to pass a season there in every year, and he stifled as it rose his consciousness that she would assent to whatever he wished, however painful or unwelcome to herself.

'It is really very unwholesome for you to be married to such a saint as Wanda,' his tormentor said to him one day. 'You do not know what a little opposition and contradiction would do for you.'

They were visiting the Hotel Noira, studying the probable effects of a new method of lighting the gallery which he contemplated, and she continued abruptly:

'Wanda has been buying very largely in Paris, has she not? And she has bought this hotel of the Noira heirs, I believe? You mean to keep it altogether as it is; and of course you will come and live in it?'

'Whenever she pleases,' he answered, intent on a Lancret not well hung.

'Whenever you please,' said Mdme. Brancka. 'Why will you pretend that Wanda has any separate will of her own? It is marvellous to see so resolute a person as she was as obediently bent as a willow-wand. But all this French property will constitute quite a fortune apart. I suppose it will all be settled on your third son, as Gela is to have Idrac? Will not you give him your title? Count Victor de Sabran will sound very pretty, and you might rebuild Romaris.'

He turned from her with impatience.

'Are we so very old that you want to parcel out our succession amongst babies? No; I do not intend to give my name to any of Wanda's children. There is an Imperial permission for them all to bear hers.'

'You are not very loyal to your forefathers,' said Mdme. Brancka. 'Wanda might well spare them one of her boys. If not, what is the use of accumulating all this property in France?'

'All that she buys is done out of respect for the Duc de Noira,' said Sabran, curtly. 'If she bear me twenty sons they will all have her name. It was settled so on the marriage-deeds and ratified by the Kaiser.'

'Are prince-consorts always deposed from any throne they have of their own?' said Mdme. Olga, in the tone that he hated. 'If I were you I should rebuild Romaris. I wonder so devoted a wife has not done so years ago.'

'There is nothing at Romaris to rebuild.'

'Decidedly,' thought his companion, 'he hates Romaris, and

has no love of his own race. Did he drown Vassia Kazán in the sea there?'

Unsparingly she renewed the subject to Wanda herself.

'You should settle the French properties on little Victor, and give him the Sabran title,' she urged to her. 'I told Réné the other day that I thought it very strange he should not care to have one of his sons named after him.'

Wanda answered coldly enough: 'In my will, if I die before him, everything goes to the Marquis de Sabran. He will make what division he pleases between his children, subject of course to Bela's rights of primogeniture.'

Mdme. Brancka was silent for a moment from surprise.

'It is odd that he should not care for Romaris,' she said, after a long pause. 'You have much more trust in him, Wanda, than it is wise to put in any man that lives.'

'Whom one trusts with oneself, one may well trust with everything else,' said her sister-in-law in a tone which closed discussion. But when she was left alone the thorn remained in her. She thought with perplexity:

'No, he does not care for Romaris. He dislikes its very name. He would never hear of one of the children bearing it. There must be something he does not say.'

She remembered sadly what the Duc de Noira had once said to her:

'In morals as in metals, my dear, you cannot work gold without supporting it by alloy.'

Mdme. Brancka had patience and skill perfect enough to refrain altogether from those hints and tentatives by which a less clever woman would have attempted to approach and surprise the key to those hidden facts which she believed to be the theme of his correspondence with Vàsàrhely and the cause of his rejection of the Russian appointment. A less clever woman would have alarmed him, and betrayed herself by perpetual allusions to the matter. But she never did this: she treated him with an alternation of subtle compliment and ironical malice, such as was most certain to allure and perplex any man, and he never by the most distant suspicion imagined that she knew anything which he desired unknown. She was a woman of strong nerve, and her equanimity in his and his wife's presence was wholly undisturbed by her consciousness that she had despatched the anonymous suggestion as a seed of discord to Hohenszalras. She knew indeed that it was not what people of her rank and breeding did do, that it was not honest warfare, that it was what even the very easy morality of her own world would have condemned with disgust; but she bore the sin of it very lightly. If she had been driven to excuse it, she would have characterised it as mere mischief. If her sister-in-law had shown her the letter, she would have glanced over it with a tranquil face and an air of utter unconcern. If she

could not have done this sort of thing she would have thought herself a very poor creature. 'I believe you could be as wicked as the Scotch Lady Macbeth,' Stefan Brancka had said once to her; and she had answered with much contempt: 'At least I promise you I should not walk in my sleep if I were so. Your Lady Macbeth was a grotesque barbarian.'

A great deal of the sin of this world, which is not at all like Lady Macbeth's, comes from the want of excitement felt by persons, only too numerous, who have exhausted excitement in its usual shapes. She had done so; she required what was detestable to arouse her, because she had lived at such high pressure that any healthy diversion was vapid and stupid to her. The destruction, if she could achieve it, of her sister-in-law's happiness, offered her in prospect such an excitement; and the whim she had taken for passion grew out of waywardness till it nearly became passion in truth. She never precisely weighed or considered its possible consequences, but she endeavoured to arouse a response in him with all the unscrupulous skill of a mistress in coquetry. When moved by Mdme. Ottilie's warning he strove honestly to avoid her, and often excused himself from obedience to her summons, the opposition only stimulated her endeavours, and made a smarting mortification and anger against him supply a double motor-power for his subjection. If she could have believed that she succeeded in making his wife anxious, she might have been content; but Wanda always received her with the same serenity and courtesy, which, if it covered disdain, covered it unimpeachably with admirable grace.

'If one broke her heart, she would only make one a grand courtesy with a bland smile,' thought Olga Brancka, irritably and impatiently. 'There are people who die standing. Wanda would do that.'

That ill weeds grow apace is a true old saw, never truer than of vindictive and envious passions. Sheer and causeless jealousy of her sister-in-law had been alive in her many years, and now, by being fed and unresisted, so grew that it became almost a restless hatred. It was far more her enmity to his wife than any other sentiment which inspired her with a fantastic and unhealthy desire to attract and detach Sabran from his allegiance. Joined to it now there was a sense of some mystery in him that baffled her, and which was to such a woman the most pungent of all stimulants. In all her *câlineries* and all her railleries she never lost sight of this one purpose, of surprising from him the secret which she believed existed. But he was always on his guard with her; even when most influenced by her atmosphere and her magnetism he did not once lose his self-control and his habitual coolness. At moments when she was most nearly triumphing, the remembrance of his wife came over him like a breath of sweet pure air that passes through a hothouse, and restored him to self-

possession and to loyalty. She began to fear that all the ability with which she had procured her exemption from Court duties, and had induced her husband to remain in Vienna, was all vain, and she grew bolder and more reckless in her use of stratagems and solicitations to keep Sabran beside her in these early spring days given over to racing and sporting, and at all the evening entertainments at which the great world met, and whither she carried with so much effect her gleaming sapphires and her black pearls.

'Black pearls argue a perverted taste,' said the Princess Ottilie once to her, and she unabashed answered:

'It is perverted tastes that make any noise in the world or possess any flavour. White pearls are much more beautiful, no doubt, but then they are everywhere, from the Crown jewel-cases to the peasants' necks; but my black pearls! you cannot find their match—and how white one's throat looks with them! I only want a green rose.'

'Chemicals can supply any deformity,' said the Princess, drily. 'Doing so is called science, I believe.'

'Do you call me a deformity?' she asked, with some annoyance.

'You are an elaborate production of the laboratory,' said the Princess, calmly. 'I am sure you will admit yourself that nature has had very little to do with you.'

'My pearls are black by a freak of nature,' said Mdme. Olga. 'Perhaps I am the same.'

The Princess made a little gesture signifying that politeness forbade her from assent, but she thought: 'Yes; you were never a white pearl, but you have steeped yourself in acids and solutions of all degrees of poison till you are darker than you need have been, and you think your darkness light, and some men think so too.'

Sabran had grown to look for that necklace of black pearls with eagerness in the society to which they belonged. Few evenings found him where Mdme. Brancka was not. She had known his Paris of the Second Empire; she had known Compiègne and Pierrefonds as he had known them; she knew all the friendships and the bywords of his old life, and all the *dessous des cartes* of that which was now around them. She amused him. She comprehended all he said, half uttered. She remembered all he recalled. At Hohenszalras he had not found any charm in this, but here did find one. She suited Paris; she knew it profoundly, she liked all its pastimes, she understood all its sports and all its slang. She hunted at Chantilly, betted at La Marche, plunged at baccara, shot and fenced well and gaily, had the theatres and all their jargon at her fingers' ends; all this made her no mean aspirant to the post of mistress of his thoughts. All which had seemed tiresome, artificial, even ridiculous, amidst the grand forests and healthful air of the Iselthal became in Paris

agreeable and even bewitching. Once he said almost angrily to his wife:

'You, who ride so superbly, should surely show yourself at the Duc's hunts. What is the use of long gallops in the Bois before any one else is out of bed?'

'I never rode for show yet,' said Wanda, in surprise. 'And you know I never would join in any sort of chase.'

'Surely such humanitarianism is exaggeration,' he said, impatiently. 'Olga Brancka rides every day they meet at Chantilly, and she is by no means of your form in the saddle.'

'I have never yet imitated Olga,' said his wife, a little coldly; but she did not object when day after day her finest horses were lent to Mdme. Brancka. She never by a word or a hint reminded him that he was not absolute master of all which belonged to her. Only when her sister-in-law wanted to take Bela and his pony to Chantilly, she made her will strongly felt in refusal.

The child, whose fancy had been fired by what he had heard of the ducal hunting, of the great hounds and the stately gatherings, like pictures of the Valois time, was passionately angered at being forbidden to go, and made his mother's heart ache with his flashing eyes and his flaming cheeks. 'Cannot she leave even the children alone? she thought, with more bitterness than she had ever felt against any one.

A few nights later they were both at the Grand Opera, in the box which was allotted to the name of the Countess von Szalras. She was herself not very well; she was pale, she sat a little away from the light. Her gown was of white velvet; she had no ornament except a cluster of gardenias and stephanotis, and her habitual necklace of pearls. Olga Brancka, in a costume of many shaded reds, marvellously embroidered in gold cords, was as gorgeous as a tropical bird, and sat with her arms upon the front of the box, playing with a fan of red feathers, or looking through her glass round the house. He talked most with her, but he looked most at his wife. There was no woman, in a full and brilliant house, who could compare with her. A thrill of the pride of possession passed through him. The malicious eyes of the other, glancing towards him over her shoulder, read his thoughts. She smiled provokingly.

'*Le mari amoureux*!' she murmured. 'Really I did not believe in the existence of that type. But is quite admirable that it should exist. Its example is very much wanted in Paris.'

He felt himself colour like a youth, but it was with irritation; he was at a loss for an answer. To have defended his admiration of his wife at the sword's point would have been easy; to defend it from a woman's ridicule was more difficult. Wanda did not hear; she was listening to the song of Dinorah, and was dreamily regretting the solitude of Hohenszalras, and thinking of what

pleasure it would be to return. All the news that Greswold and her stewards sent her thence was precious to her; no details seemed to her insignificant or without interest; and her own letters in return were full of minute attention to the welfare of every one and of everything she had left there. She was roused from her home reverie by the voice of her sister-in-law, raised more highly and saying impatiently:

'Why should you object, Réné, when I say that I wish it?'

'What do you wish?' said Wanda, who always felt a singular annoyance whenever she heard him thus familiarly addressed. 'Whatever you may wish, I am sure M. de Sabran can require no second bidding to procure it for you, if it be within the limits of the possible.'

'I wish to see a Breton Pardon,' said Olga Brancka, with a gesture of her fan towards the stage. 'There is one next week in his own country; I want him to invite me—us—to Romaris.'

Wanda, who knew that he always shrank from the mention of Romaris, interposed to save him from persecution.

'There is nothing at Romaris to invite us to,' she said for him. 'Neither you nor I can live in a cabin or a fishing boat; especially can we not in March weather.'

'You can live in a hut on your Alps,' returned the other, 'and I do not dislike tent life in the Karpathians. If he sent his major-domo down, he would soon make the sands and rocks blossom like the rose, and villages would arise as fast as they did before the great Katherine. Why not? It would be charming. Has he no feeling for the cradle of his ancestors? We must put him through a course of Lamartine.'

'An unfortunate allusion; he lived to lose Milly,' said Sabran, finding himself forced to say something. 'In midsummer, Mesdames, you might perhaps rough it, *tant bien que mal*; but now! —there is nothing to be seen except fog and surf at sea, and mud and pools inland. Even a Pardon would not reconcile you; not even the Breton jackets with scriptural stories embroidered on them, nor the bagpipes.'

'Positively, you will not take us?'

'I must disobey even your wishes in the Ides of March.'

'But whether in March or July—why do you never go yourself?'

'There is nothing to go there for,' he answered, almost losing his patience; 'a people to whom I am only a name, a strip of shore on which I only own a few wind-tormented oak-trees!'

'Only imagine the duties that Wanda would evolve in your place out of those people and those oaks!'

'I have not Wanda's virtues,' he said, half sadly, half jestingly.

'We have none of us, or the Millennium would have arrived. I cannot understand your dislike to your melancholy sea-shore.

Most of your countrymen are for ever home-sick away from their *landes* and their *dolmen*. You seem to feel no throb for the *mater patria*, even when listening to Dinorah, which sets every other Breton's heart beating.'

'My heart is Austrian,' said Sabran, with a bow towards his wife.

'That is very pretty, and what you are also obliged to say,' interrupted Mdme. Brancka. 'But why hate Romaris? For my part, I believe you see ghosts there.'

His wife said, with a quick reproach in her words: 'The ghosts of men who knew how to live and to die nobly? He would not be afraid to meet them.'

The simplicity of the words and the trustfulness of them sank into his soul. A pang of terrible consciousness went through him like poisoned steel. As his wife's eyes sought his the lights swam round with him, the music was only a confused murmur on his ear; he heard as if from afar off the voice of Olga Brancka saying: 'My dear Wanda, you are always so exalted!'

At that moment some one knocked at the door; he was glad to rise and open it to admit Count Kaulnitz and two other gentlemen.

Hardly anything else which his wife could have said would have hurt him quite so much.

As he sat there in the brilliant illumination and the hot-house warmth, with her delicate profile clear as a cameo against the light, a sensation of physical cold passed through him. He saw himself as he was, an actor, a traitor, a perjured and dishonoured man. What right had he there more than any galley-slave at the hulks?—he, Vassia Kazán?

Well tutored by the ways of the world, he laughed, and spoke, and criticised the rendering of the opera with his usual readiness of grace; but Olga Brancka had marked the fleeting expression of his face, and said to herself: 'Whatever the secret be, the key of it lies in the sands of Romaris.'

As she took his arm, when they left the box, she murmured to him: 'I shall go to Romaris, and you will take me.'

'I think not,' he said curtly, without his usual suavity. 'I am the servant of all your sex, it is true, but like all servants I am only willing to be commanded by my mistress.'

'O most faithful of lovers, I understand!' she said, with a contemptuous laugh. 'And she never commands you, she only obeys. You are very fortunate, even though you do have ghosts at your ruined tower by the sea.'

'Yes, I am fortunate, indeed,' he answered gravely, and his eyes glanced towards his wife, who was standing a stair or two below conversing with her cousin Kaulnitz.

'Even though you had to abandon Russia,' murmured Olga Brancka, dreamily. She could feel that a certain thrill passed

through him. He was startled and alarmed. Was it possible that Egon Vàsàrhely had betrayed him?

'Paris is much more agreeable than St. Petersburg,' he answered carelessly. 'I am no loser. Wanda would have been unhappy, and, what would have been worse, she would never have said so.'

'No, she would never have said so. She is like the Sioux, the Stoics, and the people who died in lace ruffles in '89. I beg your pardon, those are your people, I forgot; the people whose ghosts forbid you to entertain us at Romaris.'

'I would brave an army of ghosts to please Mdme. Brancka,' said Sabran, with his usual gallantry.

'Call me *Cousinette*, at the least,' she murmured, as they descended the last stair.

'*Bon soir*, madame!' he said, as he closed the door of her carriage.

'Are you coming with me?' said Wanda, as she went to hers.

He hesitated. 'I think I will go for an hour to the clubs, he answered. He kissed her hand. As he drew the fur rug over her skirts, she thought his face was very pale as she saw it by the lamplight. She wished to ask him if he were quite well, but she restrained herself, knowing how intolerable such importunities are to men. Instead, she smiled at him, as she said, '*Amusez-vous bien*,' and left him to divert himself as he chose.

'How little women understand men, and how poorly they love them when they do not leave them alone!' she thought, as her carriage rolled homeward. She never troubled him, never interrogated him, never even tried to conjecture what he did when away from her. Sometimes, when he returned at sunrise, she had already risen, and had said a prayer with her children, written her letters, or visited her horses, but she always met him with a smile and without a question.

It hurt her with an ever-deepening wound to perceive the attraction which Olga Brancka possessed for him. She did not for a moment believe that it was love, but she saw that it was an influence which had audacity enough to compete with her own, a sort of fascination which, commencing with dislike, increased to an unhealthy and morbid potency. She could not bring herself to speak of it to him. She was not one of those women who reproach and implore. It would have seemed to her as if both he and she would have lost all dignity in each other's sight if once they had stooped to what society calls jestingly 'a scene.' He guessed aright that if she had really believed herself displaced in his heart she would have left him without a word. She was too conscious of his entire worship of her to be moved to anything like that jealous passion which would have seemed to her the last depths of humiliation; but she was pained, fretted, stirred to a

scornful wonder by the power this frivolous woman possessed of usurping his time and giving colour to his thoughts.

It hurt her to think he feared her too much to tell her of any trouble, any folly, any memory. She reproached herself with having perhaps alienated his confidence by the gravity of her temper, the seriousness of her opinions. It would be hard to think that frivolous shallow women could inspire men with more confidence than a deeper nature could do, but perhaps it might be so. He had sometimes said to her, half jestingly: 'You should dwell among the angels; the human world is unfit for you!' Was it that which alarmed him?

With that subtle sense of what is in the air around which so often makes us aware of what is never spoken in our hearing, she was sensible that the great world in which they lived began to speak of the intimacy between her husband and the wife of her cousin Stefan. She became sensible that the world was in general disposed to resent for her, to pity her, and to censure them, whilst it coupled their names together. The very suspicion brought her an intolerable shame. When she was quite alone, thinking of it, her face burned with angry blushes. No one hinted it to her, no one breathed it to her, no one even expressed it by a glance in her presence; yet she was as well aware of what they were saying as though she had been in a hundred salons when they talked of her.

She knew the character of Olga Brancka, also, too well not to know that her own mortification would be the sweetest triumph for one of whose latent envy she had long been conscious. Ever since she had become the sole owner of the vast fortunes of the Szalras she had felt for ever upon her the evil eye of a foiled covetousness. The other had been very young and had waited long and patiently, but her hour had now come.

She said nothing to her husband, and she preserved to her cousin's wife the same perfect courtesy of manner; but in her own soul she began to suffer keenly, more from a sense of littleness in him than any mere personal feeling. To blame him, to entreat him, to seek to detach him—all these things were impossible to her.

'If all our years of union do not hold him, what will?' she thought; and the great natural hauteur of her temper could never have let her bend to the solicitation of a constancy denied to her.

One night, when they had no engagements but a ball, to which they could go at midnight, he did not come in to dinner. Always before, when he had not returned to dine, he had sent her a message to beg her not to wait. This evening there was no message. She and the Princess dined alone.

'He was never discourteous before,' said the Princess, who disliked such omissions.

'It is his own house,' said Wanda. 'He has a right to come or not to come as he likes, without ceremony.'

'There can never be too much ceremony,' said the Princess. It preserves amiability, self-respect, and good manners. It is the

silver sheath which saves them from friction. It is the distinguishing mark between the gentleman and the boor. When politeness is only for the street or the salon, it is but a poor thing. He has always been so scrupulous in these matters.'

As Wanda later crossed the head of the grand staircase, to go and dress for the ball, she heard her *maître d'hôtel* in the hall below speak to the groom of the chambers.

'Are the Marquis's horses in, do you know?' asked the former; and the latter answered:

'Yes, hours ago; they are to go for him at the Union at eleven, but they left him at the Hotel Brancka.'

Then the two officials laughed a little under their breath. Their words and their laughter came upwards distinctly to her ear. Her first impulse was a natural and passionate one of bitter burning pain and wonder. A sensation wholly new to her, of hatred and of impotence combined, seemed to choke her.

'Is this what they call jealousy?' she thought, and the mere thought checked her emotion and changed it to humiliation.

'I—I—contend with her!' she said in her soul. With a blindness before her eyes she retraced her steps, and went to the sleeping-rooms of her children. They were all asleep, as they had been for hours. She sat down beside the bed of the little Ottilie and gazed on the soft flushed loveliness of the child, bright as a rose in the dew.

She kissed the child's cheek without waking her, and sat still there some time in the faint twilight and the perfect silence, only stirred by the light breathing of the sleepers; the repose, the innocence, the silence soothed and tranquillised her.

'What matter a breath of folly?' she thought. 'He is their father; he is my love; we have all our lives to spend together.'

Then she rose and went to her chamber, and had herself clothed in a court dress of white taffetas and white velvet, embroidered with silver lilies.

'Make me look well,' she said to her women. 'Put on all my diamonds.'

When he entered, near midnight, repentant, self-conscious, almost confused, she stopped his excuses with a smile.

'I heard the servants say you dined with my cousin's wife. Why not, if it please you? But I wonder she allows you to dine without *un bout de toilette*. Will you not make haste to dress? We shall be late.'

The words were perfectly simple and kind, but as she spoke them, so royal did she look, standing there in the blaze of her jewels, with her lily-laden train, that he felt abashed, ashamed, angered against himself, yet more angered against his temptress.

The old lines of Marlowe came to his mind and his lips:

'O! thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.'

'I am not young enough to merit that quotation,' she said, with a smile; 'ten years ago perhaps——'

Her heart contracted as she spoke; she was conscious that she had wished to look well in his eyes that night. The sense that she was stooping to measure weapons with such an opponent as Olga Brancka smote her with a sense of humiliation, which did not leave her throughout the after hours in which she carried her jewels through the gorgeous crowd of the ball at the Austrian Embassy.

'If I lower myself to such a contest as that,' she thought, 'I shall lose all self-respect and all his reverence. 'I shall seem scarcely to him higher than an importunate mistress.'

Now and again there came to her a passionate anger against himself, a hardening of her heart to him, since he could be thus guilty of this inexcusable and insensate folly. But she would not harbour these; she would not judge him; she would not blame him. Her marriage vows were not mere dead letters to her. She conceived that obedience and silence were her clearest duties. Only one thing was outside her duty and beyond her force—she could not stoop to rivalry with Olga Brancka.

All at once she took a resolution of which few women would have been capable. She resolved to leave them.

Three days after the ball she said very quietly to him:

'If you do not object, I will go home and take the children. It is time they were at Hohenszalras. Bela, above all, is not improved by what he sees and hears here; his studies are broken and his fancy is excited. In a very little while he would learn quite to despise his country pleasures, and forget all his own people. I will take them home.'

He looked at her quickly in surprise.

'I do not think I can leave Paris immediately,' he said, with hesitation. 'I have many engagements. Of course you can send the children.'

'I said I should go, not you. I long to see my own woods in their first leaf,' she answered, with a smile. 'It will be better for you to remain. No one ought to be allowed to suppose that you are bound to my side. That is neither for your dignity nor mine.'

'Has any one suggested——' he began, and paused in embarrassment, for he remembered the incessant taunts and innuendoes of Olga Brancka.

'I do not listen to suggestions of that sort,' she replied tranquilly. 'You wish to remain here, and I wish to return home. We are both at liberty to do what we like. My love,' she added, with a grave tenderness in her voice, 'have I so poor an opinion of you that I dare not leave you alone? I think I should hardly care for a fealty which was only to be retained by my constant presence. That is not my ideal.'

He coloured; he was uncertain what to reply: before her he felt unworthy and disloyal. A vast sense of her immeasurable nobility swept over him, and made him conscious of his own unworthiness.

'Whatever you wish, I wish,' he murmured, and was aware that this could not be what she would gladly have heard him say. 'I will follow you soon. Your heart is always in your highlands. I know that you are too grand a creature to be happy in cities. I have the baser leaven in me that is not above them. The forests and the mountains do not say to me all that they do to you.'

'Men want the movement of the world, no doubt,' she said, without showing any trace of disappointment. 'I only care for the subjective life; I am very German, you see. The woods interest me, and the world does not.'

No more passed between them on the subject, but she gave orders to her people to make arrangements for her departure and her children's in two days' time, and sent out her cards of farewell.

'Do you think you are wise?' the Princess ventured to say to her.

She answered:

'I know what you mean, dear mother; yes, I think so. To struggle for influence with another, and that other Olga! I should indeed despise myself if I could stoop so low. If he miss me he can follow me. If he do not—then he has no need of me.'

'I confess I do not understand you,' said Mdme. Ottilie; 'to surrender so meekly!'

'I surrender nothing,' she said, almost sternly. 'I know what I have seen again and again in society. The woman jealous and anxious, losing ground in his esteem and her own every hour, and rendering alike herself and him actors in a ludicrous comedy for the mockery of the world around them—a world which never has any sympathy for such a struggle. Indeed, why should it have? for if the jealousy of a lover be poetic, the jealousy of a wife is only ridiculous. I *am* his wife; I am not his gaoler. I refuse to admit to others or to him or to myself that any other could be wholly to him what I am; and I should lose that place I hold, lose it in his eyes and my own, if I once admitted my dethronement possible.'

She spoke with more force and anger than was common with her, and her auditor admired while she still failed to comprehend her.

'Is there a more pitiable spectacle,' she continued, 'than that of a wife contending with others for that charm in her husband's sight which no philtres and no prayers can renew when once it has fled for ever? Women are so unwise. Love is like a bird's song—beautiful and eloquent when heard in forest freedom, harsh

and worthless in repetition when sung from behind prison bars. You cannot secure love by vigilance, by environment, by captivity. What use is it to keep the person of a man beside you, if his soul be truant from you? You all say that Olga Brancka has power over him. If she have, let her use it and exhaust it, it will not last long; but I will not sink to her level by contesting it with her. For what can you take me?'

In her glance the leonine wrath of the Szalras flashed for a moment; her face was pale, she paced the room with a hasty and uneven step. The Princess sought a timid refuge in silence. There were certain heights in the nature and impulses of her niece of which she, a dweller on a lower plain, never caught sight. There were times when the haughty reserve and the admirable patience of this stronger character made a union which awed her, and altogether escaped her comprehension.

In two days' time she left Paris, the Princess and the children accompanying her.

He felt his heart misgive him as he let her go. What was Olga Brancka, what was Paris, what was all the world compared to her? As he kissed her hands in farewell before her servants at the *Gare de l'Est*, the impulse came over him to throw himself into the carriage beside her, and return with her to the old, fair, still, peaceful life of Hohenszalras. But he resisted it; he heard in memory the mocking of Olga Brancka's voice saying to him:

'*Ah, quel mari amoureux!*'

He had his establishments, his engagements, his horses, his friends, his wagers; he would seem ridiculous to all Paris if he could not endure a few weeks' separation from his wife. A great banquet at his house was arranged to take place in a few days' time, at which only great Legitimist nobles would be present, and at which the toast of '*Le Roi!*' would be drunk with solemn honours. What would they say of him if he failed to receive them because he had followed his wife into Austria? With a thousand sophisms he reconciled himself to remaining there without her, and would not face the consciousness within him that the real motive of his staying on through the coming weeks in Paris was that Olga Brancka was there. For herself, she parted with him tenderly, kindly, without any trace of doubt in him or of purpose in her departure.

'You will come when you wish,' were her last words to him. 'You know well, dear, that Hohenszalras without you will seem like a sadly empty eagle's nest.'

All his offences against her were heavy on him as he returned to the great house no longer graced by her presence. He would have given twenty years of his life to have been able to undo what he had done when he had taken a name not his own. He was sensible of great talents in him which might have brought him to renown had he been willing to face hardship and laborious effort.

Even as he had been at his birth—even as Vassia Kazán—he might have achieved such eminence as would have made him her equal in honest honour. But he had won the world and her by a lie, and the act was irrevocable. Chance and circumstances may be controlled or altered, but the fate which men make for themselves always abides with them for good or ill: a spirit of either good or ill which once incarnated by their incantations never departs from them till death.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ARE you actually left alone?' said Mdme. Olga gaily to him that evening, when they met at an embassy. 'I thought Wanda was an Una, who never let her lion loose?'

'The remembrance of her would recall him if she did,' he answered quickly and coldly. 'She does not believe in chains because she does not need them.'

'Most knightly of men!' she said, with a little laugh. 'It must be very fatiguing to have to play the part you so affect, even in absence. Our metaphers are involved, but your loyalty seems one and indivisible. I suppose you are left on parole?'

The departure of his wife had disconcerted and disappointed her; as he, to realise his position, had required to have the world about him as spectator of it, so she felt all her triumph over him powerless and pointless if Wanda von Szalras were not there to suffer by the sight of it. He had remained; that was much; but she felt that the absence of his wife had made him colder to herself, that the blank left made a void between them, that remembrance might be more potent with him than vicinity; and his consciousness that he was trusted might have more power than any interference or opposition would have had. She became sensible that she had less charm for him; that he was less easily moved by her mockery and attracted by her wit. His earlier animosity to her still flashed fire now and then, and with this sense of revived resistance in him her own feeling, which had been born of caprice, took giant growth as a passion. She grew cruel in it. If she could only know his secret she thought she would crush him with it, grind him under her foot, torture him. There was a touch of the tigress under her feverish and artificial life.

'*Il faut brusquer la chose*,' she said savagely to herself, when he had been alone in Paris about a fortnight, and each day had convinced her that he grew more wary of her, more unwilling to surrender himself to the fascination which she exercised upon his baser nature. When she attempted jests at his wife he stopped her sternly, and she felt that she lost ground with him. Yet she

had still a power upon him; an unhealthy and fatal power. When he looked at her he thought often of two lines:—

'O Venus! schöne Frau meine,
Ihr seyd eine Teufelinne.'

'Wanda writes to you every day?' she asked once.

'She writes often,' he answered.

'And what does she say of me?'

'Nothing!'

'Nothing? What does she write about? Of the priest's sermons and the horses' coughs, of how much wood has been cut, and how many shoes the children wear, of how she sorrows for you, and says Latin prayers for you twice a day?'

His face darkened.

'Madame my cousin,' he said irritably, 'will you understand that men do not like their religion spoken lightly of? My wife is my religion.'

Then Mdme. Olga laughed with silvery, hysterical laughter, and clapped her hands as if she were applauding a good comedy, and cried shrilly: '*Oh! la bonne blague!*'

But she knew very well that it was not '*blague*.' She knew very well, too, that though he was subjugated by a certain sorcery when in her presence, when absent his good taste condemned, and his good sense escaped, her. She was one of those women who have a thousand means of usurping a man's time, and are not scrupulous if some of those measures are bold ones. All her admirers tacitly left the field open to one for whom she made no scruple of her preference; and, under pretext of her relationship to him, she contrived many ways to bring him beside her. Every day he said to himself that he would go home on the morrow; but each day bore its diversions, its claims, its interests, and each day found him in Paris, sometimes driving her to the Cascade, to St. Germains, to Versailles, sometimes escorting her to the tribune of a race-course, or a *première* at a theatre, sometimes dining with her in her pretty room, the table strewn with rose-leaves, and the windows open upon flowering orange trees.

When he wrote home he wrote eloquent, witty, clever letters; but he did not speak in them of the woman with whom he spent so much of his time, and his wife as she read them wished that they had been less clever, and had said more. She began to fear lest she had done unwisely. She did not repent, for it seemed to her that she could have done nothing else with any self-esteem; but she dreaded lest she had over-estimated the power of her own memory upon him. Yet even so, she thought, it was better that he should degrade himself and her in her absence than her presence; and she still felt a certainty—baseless, perhaps—that he would yet pause in time before he actually gave her a rival in her cousin's wife.

'If it were any other,' she thought, 'he might fall; but with Olga, never! never!'

And she prayed for him half the night, till her prayer seemed to beat against the very gates of heaven. But in the day, to her children, to the Princess, to the household, she seemed always tranquil, cheerful, and at ease. She applied herself arduously to all those duties which her great estates had always brought with them, and in occupation and exertion strove to keep her anxiety at bay, and attain that self-control which enabled her to write in return to him letters which had no shade of reproach in them, no hint of distrust.

It was now June.

The Paris of the world of fashion was soon about to take wing, to disperse itself to country-houses, sea-shores, and foreign baths; to change its place, but to take with it wheresoever it should go all its agitation, its weariness, its fever, its delirium, and its intrigues. Olga Brancka saw the close of the season approach with regret yet expectation. She knew that Sabran must escape her or succumb to her; and she had a bitter, enraged sense that the power of his wife was stronger over him than her own. '*Il faut brusquer la chose*,' she said again and again to herself. She grew reckless, imprudent, and was tempted to discard even that external decency which her station in the world had made her assume. She would have compromised herself for him with any publicity he might have chosen to exact. But she had never been able to beguile him into any sort of declaration. When he most felt the danger of her attraction, when he was nearest forgetting honour and decency, nearest submitting, the memory of his wife saved him. He recovered his coolness; he drew back from the abyss. Once or twice she was tempted to throw the name of Vassia Kazán between them and watch its effect; but she refrained—she knew so little!

'You will not take me to Romaris?' she said, for the hundredth time, one evening, as they rode towards St. Germains.

He laughed.

'*Cousinette*! if you and I went off to Finisterre you will confess that we should make a pretty paragraph for the papers, and Count Stefan would have a very good right to run me through the lungs.'

'Stefan!' she echoed, with contempt. 'It would be the first time he ever—— Besides, you have had duels; you are not afraid of them; and, yet again, besides I do not see what harm we should do if we looked at your *chouans* and *chasse-marées* for a few days. No one need even know it.'

She spoke quite innocently, but her black eyes watched him with the 'Teufelinne' cunning and passion. He caught the look. He put his hand in the breast-pocket of his coat, where a letter of his wife's was lying.

'It is out of the question,' he said, almost rudely. 'I have no wish to furnish *Figaro* with so good a jest. Romaris,' he added, with a smile, 'is of course at your service, like all I possess, if you are so bent upon seeing its desolation. But you must pardon my receiving you by deputy, in the person of the curé, who is seventy years old and is the son of a fisherman.'

She cut her mare across the ears with a fierce gesture and galloped away from him. Sabran as he galloped after her thought with a vague apprehension, 'Why does she dwell on Romaris? Does she suspect that I abhor the place? Can she have seen anything in my looks or in my words that has raised any doubts in her?' But he told himself that this was impossible. As she rode her heart swelled with rage and mortification. There were many men in the world who would have been happy to go at her call to Breton wilds, or any other solitude; and he refused her, bluntly, coldly, because away there in the heart of Austria a woman, who was the mother of his children, span, and read, and said her prayers, and led her stupid, blameless, stately life! He escaped her just because that woman lived! All that hot, cruel caprice which she called love fastened upon him, and swore that it would not be denied. She had a sense of a grand white figure which stood for ever betwixt him and her. She brought herself almost to believe that it was Wanda von Szalras who wronged her.

Two nights later she was present at the last night of a gay comic opera which had made all Paris laugh ever since the first fogs of winter; a dazzling little opera, with a stage crowded by Louis Treize costumes, and music that went as trippingly as a shepherdess's feet in a pastoral. Sabran went to her box after a dinner-party which he had given to a score of men. She looked well, in a gown of many shades of yellow, which few women could have braved, but which suited her night-like eyes and her pearly skin; she had deep yellow roses, natural ones, in her bosom and hair.

'I am flattered that you wear my yellow roses,' he murmured.

'If you had sent me white ones you would have outraged the spirit of Wanda.'

He made an impatient movement.

'When are you going home?' she said, suddenly.

'Soon!' he answered, with the same impatience.

'Soon means anything, from an hour to a year. Besides, you have said it for the last six weeks.'

'Do you go to Noisettiers?'

'Of course I go to Noisettiers; you can come there if you please. I am more hospitable than you.'

He was silent. Noisettiers was a little place on the Norman coast, which Stefan Brancka had given to her on his marriage; a pleasure-house, with Swiss roofs, Cairene windows, Italian balconies and a Persian court, which was bowered amongst lime-trees, and filbert trees, near Villeville, and had been the scene of

much riotous midsummer gaiety when she had filled it with Parisians and Russians.

'You are always too good to me,' murmured Sabran, in the meaningless compliment of usage, as other men entered her box. But she knew by the coldness of his eyes, by the slightness of his smile, that he would no more go to Noisettiers than to Romaris.

'If Wanda had only remained here,' she thought angrily, opening and shutting her tortoiseshell fan, 'he would have done whatever I had chosen. Men are mere children; thwart them and they pine.

'I suppose,' she said aloud to him, 'you will have your own house-parties at Hohenszalras, as stiff as a minuet, crammed with grand dukes and grand duchesses, all decorum and dignity, all ennui and etiquette? By-the-by, are you restored again to the Emperor's good graces?'

'It is not likely that I shall be so,' replied Sabran, who always dreaded the subject. 'If ever I be so fortunate I shall owe it to the influence Wanda possesses.'

'Why did you offend him?' she said, bending her inquisitive glance upon him.

'All sovereigns are offended when not obeyed. We have discussed this so often. Need we discuss it again in a theatre?'

'You are very impenetrable,' she said. 'Your rule of conduct must follow the lines of M. de Nothomb's "*il ne faut jamais se brouiller, ni se familiariser, avec qui que ce soit; c'est le secret de durer.*'

'M. de Nothomb only meant his rule to apply to his own sex,' replied Sabran. 'With yours, unless a man be either *familiarisé* or *brouillé*, his life must be dull and his experience small.'

'Which will you be with me?' she said, with significance. 'The choice is open.'

He understood that the words contained a menace.

'I am your cousin and your humble servitor,' he said with gallantry, giving his place up to a young Spanish noble.

'Take me home,' she said to him an hour later, before the last scene of the opera. 'Come to supper. I told them to have ortolans and bisque. One is always hungry after a theatre, and we must have a last long talk, since you go to your duties and I to my sea-bathing.'

He desired to refuse; he dreaded her inquisitiveness and her solicitation; but she had a magic about her, she subdued him to her side even while he mentally resisted it. The fleshly charm of the 'Teufelinne' was potent as he wrapped her cloak about her and touched the yellow roses as he fastened it. Almost in silence he entered her carriage, and drove beside her to her house. She was silent also, affecting to yawn and be tired, but by the gleam of the lamp he saw her great black eyes glowing in the darkness, as he had seen those of a jaguar in the forests of America glow, as it watched to seize a sleeping lizard or unwary capybara.

The few streets were soon traversed by her rapid Russian horses, and together they entered the little hotel, with its strong perfume of orange flowers and jessamine from the garden about it. The midsummer stars were brilliant overhead; he looked up at them, pausing on the threshold.

'You are thinking how they shine on Wanda?' she said, with the laugh he hated. 'Probably they do nothing of the kind. I dare say she is wrapped in fog and cloud: those are the joys of the heights.'

The little supper was perfectly prepared, and served with a fine claret and some tokayer; the lights burned mellowy in the transparent gourds; the windows were open, the moonlight touched the great gold birds, the silver lilies on the walls. She had studied how to live and how to please. She held that love was born as much out of scenic effects as of the senses. In her own way she was a true artist. She had left him a few moments to change her attire to a tea-gown, which was one cloud and cascade of lace from head to foot; the yellow roses still nestled at her breast.

Stretched on a divan of Oriental stuff, she put out her hand for a cigar he lighted for her, and said with a little smile:

'You cannot say I do not know how to live.'

A brutal response rose to his lips: she did not know how to bridle her life: but he could not say it. He murmured a compliment, and added: 'What a supreme artist the theatre has lost by your being born with a Countess's *couronne*!'

'Yes,' she said, with her eyes on the rings of smoke that her crimson lips parted to send upward. 'Sometimes when Stefan does not give me liberty, or Egon does not pay my accounts, I make them both tremble by a threat that I will go on the stage. I should certainly draw all Paris and all Vienna too. But perhaps it is too late; in a few more years I shall have to marry my daughters. Can you realise that? I am sure I cannot. Now it will suit Wanda perfectly to do that, and *her* daughter is not three years old; she is always so fortunate.'

He listened impatiently.

'If we left Wanda's name alone it might be better. Did you bring me to supper to talk of her?'

'No; she is your Madonna, I know. One must not be sacrilegious, but one cannot always worship. You do not touch the tokayer; it came from the Kaiser; you are always so abstemious—you irritate me.'

She poured out some of the wine into a jewel-like goblet of Venice, and gave it to him and made him drink it. She sat up on her divan and leaned towards him; the breeze from the garden stirred the laces of her gown and made the golden roses nod.

'Wine openeth the heart of man,' she cried gaily. 'Open yours and tell me frankly why you refused to go to Russia? We are not in a theatre now.'

'Are we not?' he said, with the smile which she feared as her

greatest foe. 'Whether or not, I fear I must refuse to please you; the matter lies between me and—the Emperor.'

She remarked the hesitation which made him pause before the last word.

'Between him and Egon,' she thought; but after all, what was the secret to her except as a means of influence over him. She believed that she had here present subtler and surer methods of influence which could attain their end without coercion.

She ceased to pursue the theme, and grew gentle and winning; she felt that he was on the defensive. He had come weakly enough into the very heart of temptation, but he was on his guard against her sorceries. Lying back amongst her cushions she amused him with that gay and discursive chatter of which she had the secret, and which imperceptibly induced him to relax his vigilance and to feel her charm. There was that about her which made all scruples seem ridiculous; there was a contagion of levity and mockery in her which awakened in him the cynicism of earlier years, and made him only heed the marvellous force of seduction of which she was mistress.

'You ought to be ambitious,' she continued softly. 'I think you might achieve any eminence if you chose to seek it.'

'Surely I have enough blessings from fortune not to tempt it by that last infirmity?'

'You mean you have married a very rich aristocrat,' she said, drily. 'Oh, yes; you have made one of the finest marriages in Europe; but that is not quite the same thing as "winning off your own hand." It is a lucky *coup*, like breaking the bank at *roulette*, but it cannot give you the same feeling that a successful soldier or a successful politician has, nor the same eminence. Indeed, I am not sure that your wife's possession of every possible good and great thing has not prevented you gathering laurels for yourself. You have dropped into a nest lined with rose-leaves; to have fallen on the rocks might have been better. Do you know,' she added, with a little smile, 'if I had been your wife I should have given you no rest until you had become the foremost man of the empire. I should not have cared about horses and peasants and children; but I should have loved you.'

He moved uneasily, conscious of the implied satire upon his wife, conscious also of a vibration of intense passion in the last words. He remained silent.

He knew well that had she been his wife, she would have been as false to him as she was false to Stefan Brancka. But the words sent a thrill through him half of emotion, half of repugnance. There was little light on the divan where she reclined, the dewy darkness of the garden was behind her; he could see the outlines of her form, the glister of rings on her hands, and jewels at her throat, the shine of her eyes watching him ardently.

His heart beat with a certain excitation; he vaguely felt that some hour of fate had come.

They were as utterly alone as though they had been in a desert; no one of her household would have ventured to approach that room without a summons from her. A little drummer in silver beat twelve strokes upon his drum, which was a clock. A nightingale was singing in the Cape jessamine beneath one of the casements. The light was low and soft, so faint that the moonbeams could be seen where they strayed over the cranes and lilies on the wall. She said to herself once more: '*Il faut brusquer la chose.*' If she let him go now he would escape her for ever.

Ever and again there came to him the memory of his wife, but he shrank from it as he would have shrunk from seeing her in a gambling den. It seemed almost a profanity to remember her here. He longed to rise and get away, yet he desired to remain. He knew that every moment increased his danger, and yet he prolonged those moments with irresistible pleasure. Every gesture, glance, and breath of this woman was provocative and alluring, yet he thought as he felt her power always the same thing—'*ihr seyd eine Teufelinne.*' Willingly he would have embraced her and then killed her, that she might no more haunt him and do no more harm on earth.

As he sat with his face half averted from her she gazed at him with her burning, covetous eyes; the droop of his eyelids, the curves of his lips, the fairness of his features all seemed to her more beautiful than they had ever done; the very disquiet and coldness that were in them only allured her the more. She leaned nearer still and took his wrist in her fingers.

'Come to Noisettiers,' she murmured.

'No,' he said, sharply and sternly, but he did not withdraw his hand.

'Why not?' she said, with her whole person swayed towards him as by an irresistible impulse. 'Why do you affect to be of ice? You are not indifferent to me. You only obey what you think a law of honour. Why do you try to do that? There is only one law—love.'

He strove to draw away from him, but feebly, the clinging of her warm fingers. The caress of her breath on his cheek, the scent of the roses in her breast intoxicated him for the instant. She bent nearer and nearer, and still held him closely in her slender hands, which were as strong as steel.

'You love me?' she murmured, so low that it scarce stirred the air, and yet had all the potency of hell in it. A shudder went over him; the baseness of voluptuous impulse and the revulsion of conscious shamefulness shook his strength as though it were a reed in the wind. For a moment his arms enclosed her, his heart beat against hers; then he thrust her away from him and rose to his feet.

'Love you? No, a thousand times no!' he said, with unutterable scorn. 'You are a shameless temptress; you can rouse the beast that lies hid in all men. I despise you, I detest you—I could

kiss you and kill you in a breath; but love!—how dare you speak the word? Mine is hers; I am hers: if I sinned to her with you I would strangle you when I awoke!'

All the fierceness and the barbaric strength of the blood of desert and of steppe broke up in him from underneath the courtesy and calm of many long years of culture. He was born of men who had slain their mistresses for a glance, and ravished their captives in war, and yielded them to no release but death, and his hereditary instincts broke the bonds of custom and of habit, and spoke in him now as a wild animal breaks its bars and leaps up in frank brutality of wrath. He thrust her backward and backward from him, rose to his feet, wrenched aside with rude hand the eastern stuffs that hung before the door, and left her presence and her house before any power of voice or movement had come back to her.

As he pushed past the waiting servants in the vestibule, and went through the courtyard and the gateway, he looked up once again at the stars shining overhead.

'Wanda! Wanda!' he said, with a deep breath, as men may call in their extremity on God.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Within half an hour he had given a few orders to his major-domo, and had taken a special train to overtake the express, already far on its way that night towards Strasburg. No steam could fly as fast as his own wishes flew. Never had he felt happier than as the train rushed across the windy level country of the north-east, bearing him back to the peace and tenderness and honour which waited for him at Hohenszalrasburg. He was content with himself, and the future smiled on him. He slept soundly all that night, undisturbed by the panting and oscillating of the carriage, and visited by tranquil dreams. He did not break the journey till he reached S. Johann. The weather in the German lands was wild and rough. The sound of the winds and rushing rains brought the remembrance of that year of the floods which had been the sweetest of his life. Amidst the Austrian Alps the cold was still keen, and the brisk buoyant air and the strength that seems always to come on winds that blow over glaciers and snow-fields were welcome to him, like a familiar and trusty friend. The servants who met him in answer to his message, the horses who knew him and whinnied with pleasure, the summits of the Glöckner, on which a noonday sun was shining, all were delightful to him: he thought of the Catullian 'laugh in the dimples of home.'

Their ways of life renewed themselves as if they had never been broken. She divined what had passed, but she never spoke

of it. She was happy in his return, and never disturbed its happiness by inquiry or allusion. He entered with eagerness into plans and projects which had of recent years ceased to interest him, and he resumed his old occupations and pursuits with almost boyish ardour. His restlessness was appeased, and if a dull apprehension beat at his heart with warning now and then, it was scarcely heeded in his deep sense of the intense and forbearing love his wife bore to him. She never asked him how he had escaped from Olga Brancka. She was satisfied that if he had been faithless to herself, he would not have returned with such single-hearted contentment and such lover-like fervour.

'You are the only woman in the world who can forbear from putting questions,' said Mdme. Ottilie to her.

She answered smiling:

'I remember Psyche's lamp.'

'That is very pretty,' said the Princess, 'and I do believe you would never have cared for the lamp. But, all the same, if the god had been as honest as he ought to have been, would he have minded the light?'

'I do not think that enters into the story,' said Wanda. 'He did not resent the light either; he resented the inquisitiveness.'

'You are the only woman who has none,' said the Princess, taking up her netting, and at times she called her niece Psyche, little imagining the terrible suitability of the name, and the secret that was hidden in darkness from that noble confidence of the last of the Szalras.

The remembrance of that night of base temptation left a sense of uneasiness and of insecurity upon Sabran, but the influence his temptress had possessed with him was of that kind which fades instantly in absence. He honestly abhorred the memory of her, and never spoke her name.

His wife, to whom the utter degradation of her cousin's wife would never have seemed possible in a woman nobly born and nurtured, never imagined the truth or anything similar to it.

Another woman would have tormented herself and him with innuendo or direct reference to what had passed in those weeks when she had not been beside him, and on which he was absolutely silent. But she put all baseness of curiosity from her; she was content to know that her own influence in absence had been strong enough to bring him back to his allegiance. She would not have wished to hear, had he offered to reveal them, all the various conflicts of good and evil which had gone on in his mind, all the subtle changes by which her own power had been for a moment obscured, only to regain still stronger and purer ascendency. She was indulgent because she knew human nature well, and expected no miracles. That he had returned of his own accord, and was content so to return, was all she desired to know. If to attain that equanimity had cost her many a struggle, the fact was shut in her

own soul and could concern no other. She esteemed it a poor love which could not bear to be sometimes shut out in silence.

'For a man to be manly he must be free,' she thought; 'and how can he be free if there be some one to whom he must confess every trifle? He owes allegiance to no one but his own conscience.'

If in their intercourse she had found his honour less scrupulous, his code less fine than her own; if she had been ever pained by a certain levity and looseness of principle betrayed by him at times, she always strove not to attach too much importance to these. The creeds of a man of pleasure were necessarily different, she told herself, to those of a woman reared in austere tenets, and guarded by natural pride and purity of disposition. Whenever the fear crossed her that he might not be always faithful to her she put it away from her thoughts. 'What I have to do,' she thought, 'is to be true to him, not to question or to doubt him: a man's faithfulness has always such a different reading to a woman's.'

Sabran never quite understood the perfect indulgence to him which she combined with the greatest severity to herself. He thought that the same measure as she gave she would exact. The serenity and grandeur of her character made it seem to him impossible that she would ever have compassion for weakness or for falsehood. He fancied, wrongly, that a woman less noble herself would be more indulgent than she would be to error. He did not realise that it is only a great nature which can wholly understand the full force of the words *aimer c'est pardonner*. And then again, he said to himself, she might have pardoned a fault, a crime even, of high passion, of bold mutiny against moral law, but how could she ever pardon a meanness, a treason, a lie?

So he let the months slide away, and did not say to her whilst he still might have said it himself, 'I am not what you think me.'

But he was impressed and profoundly affected by that mute magnanimity, which never vaunted itself or claimed any praise for itself by any hint or suggestion. He felt disgust at his own folly in ever having cared to be a single instant in the presence of the woman of whose libertinage and inconstancy his yellow roses had been the fitting symbol. When he had cast her from him, rejected and despised, the glamour she had thrown over him had fallen like scales from the eyes of one blind. Her memory made the beauty of his wife's nature and thoughts seem to him more than ever things for reverence and worship. More than ever his soul shrank within him when he recollected the treachery and the deception with which he had rewarded this noblest of friends.

Ah! why when she had stretched out her hand to him in that supreme gift of herself, in that golden sunset hour after the autumn floods of Idrac, had he not had courage to kneel at her

feet and tell her all? Perchance she might still have loved him, might have still stooped to him!

He strove his utmost to conceal these anxious self-reproaches from her, lest she should imagine that his hours of gloom were caused by any lingering shadows of the fatal folly which had been forced on him like a drug by Olga Brancka. The sorceress had failed, and he had flung down and shivered in atoms the glass out of which she had bidden him drink; she was to him as utterly forgotten as though she were in her grave; but not so easily could he banish the memory of his own treachery to his wife. The very forbearance of her made him the more conscious of guilt, when he remembered that one man lived who knew that he was unworthy even to kiss the hem of her garment. He had been faithful to her in the present, and so could greet her with clean hands and honest lips; but in the past he had betrayed her foully; he had done her what in her sight, if ever she knew it, would be the darkest dishonour the treachery of a human life could hold.

The sense of crime, which had slept quiet and mute in his conscience so many years, was now awake and seldom to be stilled.

The time passed serenely; the autumn brought its hardy sports, the winter its vigorous pastimes. With the new year she gave him another son; she named him after Egon Vàsàrhely, without opposition from Sabran.

'He is worthier to give them a name than I,' he thought bitterly.

They did not care to move from the green Iselthal. Of Olga Brancka they heard but rarely. Now and then she sent a little witty flippant note to Hohenszalras, dated from Paris or Trouville, or Biarritz, or Vienna, or Monaco, or St. Petersburg, according to the season and her caprices. Of these little meaningless notes Wanda did not speak to her husband. She could not bring herself to talk to him of the woman who had so nearly wrecked their peace, and it seemed to her that the old saw was wise: 'Let sleeping dogs lie.' It appeared to her, too, that theirs and Mdme. Brancka's paths in life would henceforth very seldom, if ever, meet.

Sabran believed that her overtures towards him had sprung from one of those insane unhealthy passions which sometimes are created by their very sense of their own immorality; he fancied it had died of its own fire. He did not credit her with the tenacity and endurance she really possessed. He had little doubt that long ere now some dandy of the boulevards, some soldier of the palace, had supplanted him in that brazier of heated senses which she called by courtesy her heart. He mistook, as the cleverest men often do mistake, in underrating the cruelty of women.

The summer was a soft and sunny one, and they enjoyed it in simple and healthful pleasures of the open air and of the affections.

The children throve and never ailed a day. Sabran had lost all desire to return to the excitations and passions of the world; his wife was more than content in the joys of her home; and if above her a storm brooded, if in his heart there fretted ceaselessly the chafing sense of a gross treachery, of an incessant peril, she was as ignorant of what menaced her as the child to whom she had given birth. With present security also, the sense of dread often wore away from him.

The months sped on swiftly and serenely for the mistress of Hohenszalras, the only shadows cast on them coming from accidents to her poor people through flood or avalanche, and the occasional waywardness and turbulence of her eldest born. Bela had not been the better for his sojourn in a great city, where parasites are never lacking to the heir of wealth, and where his companions had been small coquettes and dandies *pétris du monde* at six years old. The bright vigorous hardihood of the child had escaped the contagion of affectation, but he had arrived at an inordinate sense of his own importance and dignity, despite the memory of the Dauphin which often came to him. He grew quite beyond the management of his governantes, and, though he never disobeyed his mother, gave little heed to any one else's authority. Of Sabran he was alone afraid; but at the same time he preserved for him that silent intense admiration which a young child sometimes nourishes for a man by whom he is little noticed, but who is his ideal of all power, force, and achievement, and of whom he hears heroic tales.

He was now seven years old. It was time to think of a tutor for him, since he was beyond the control of the women entrusted with his education. When she spoke of it to his father, he answered at once:

'Take Greswold. He has the best temper in the world to govern a child, and he is a great scholar.'

'But he is a physician,' she objected.

'He has studied the mind no less than the body. He adores the boy, and will influence him as a stranger could not. Speak to him; he will be only too happy. As no one is ever ill here,' he added with a smile, 'his present position is a sinecure; he can very well combine another office with it.'

'I wanted you to take Bela in your hands,' he said later to the old doctor, 'because I say to you what I should not care to say to a stranger. The boy has all my faults in him. As he exactly resembles me physically so he does morally. There is in him, too, I am afraid, a tendency to tyranny that I have never had. I am not cruel to anything, though I am indifferent to most things; he would be cruel if he were allowed; perhaps it is mere masterfulness which may be conquered by time. I imagine he has also my fatal facility. I call it fatal because it renders acquisition and proficiency so easy that it prevents laboriousness and depth of

knowledge. You are much wiser than I am, and will know how to educate the child much better than I can tell you how to do. Only remember two things: first, that he is cursed by certain hereditary passions coming to him from me which must be checked and calmed, or he will grow up with a character dangerous to himself, and odious to others in the great position he will one day occupy. Secondly, that if any child of mine ever bring any kind of sorrow upon her, I shall be of all men the most wretched. You have always been my good friend. Be yet more so in preventing my suffering from the pain of seeing my own moral deformities face me and accuse me in the life of her eldest son.'

The old physician listened with emotion and with surprise. Of the moral defects Sabran spoke of, he had seen none. Since his marriage his tenderness to his wife, his kindliness to his dependents, his courage in field sports, and his courtesy as a host had been all that any one had seen in him; whilst his abstinence from all interference with and all appropriation of his wife's vast possessions had aroused a yet deeper esteem in all who surrounded him. As he heard, over the old man's mind drifted the memories of all he had observed at the time of Sabran's accident in the forest and subsequent prostration of nerve and will. But he thrust these vague suspicions away, for he was blameless in his loyalty to the house he served, and honoured as his master the husband of the Countess von Szalras.

'I will do my uttermost to deserve so precious a trust,' he said, with deep feeling. 'I think that you exaggerate childish foibles, and attach too much importance to them. The little Count Bela is imperious and high-spirited, nothing more; and in this great household, where every one salutes him as the heir, it is difficult to keep him wholly unspoiled by adulation and consciousness of his own future power. But a great pride has been always the mark of the race of Szalras, although my lady has so chastened hers that you may well believe the line she springs from has been always faultless as—if one may say so of any mortal—one may say she herself is. It is not from you alone that the child inherits his arrogance, if arrogant he be. As for his facility, it is like a fairy's wand, a caduceus of the gods; it may be used for good unspeakable. At least believe this, my dear lord, what any human teacher can do I will do, thankful to pay my debt so easily. I have always,' he added less gravely, 'had my own theories as to the education of young princes, and like all theorists believe every one else who has had any doctrine on that subject to be wrong. I shall be charmed to have so happy an occasion in which to put my theories to the test. I think nature and learning together, the woods and the study, should be the preparation for the world.'

'I have entire confidence in your judgment,' said Sabran. 'Above all, try and keep the boy from pride. Train him, as

Madame de Genlis trained the d'Orleans boys, for any reverse of fortune. He is born with that temper which would make any humiliation, any loss of position, unbearable to him; and who can say——'

He paused abruptly: what he thought was, who could say that in future years Egon Vàsàrhely might not tell his son of that secret shame which hung over Hohenszalras, a cloud unseen, but big with tempest? Greswold looked at him in a surprise which he could not conceal, and Sabran left his presence hastily, under excuse of visiting some stallions arrived that morning from Tunis; he was afraid of the interrogations which the old man might be led in all innocence to make. Greswold looked after him with some anxiety; he had become sincerely attached to his lord, whose life he had saved in Pregratten; but the unevenness of his spirits, the unhappiness which evidently came over him at times in the midst of his serene and fortunate life, the strangeness of a few words which from time to time he let fall, had not escaped the quick perception of the wise physician, and gave him at intervals a vague, uncertain feeling of apprehension.

'Pride!' he thought now. 'If the little Count were not proud he would be no Szalras; and if his father have not also that superb sin he must be a greater philosopher than I have ever thought him, and no fit mate for our lady. What should overtake the child? If war or revolution ruin him when he grows up, that will be no humiliation; he will be none the less Bela von Szalras, and if he be like my lady he will be quite content with being that. Nevertheless, one must try and teach him humility—that is, one must try and make the stork creep and the oak bend!'

Sabran, as he examined his Eastern horses and conversed about them with Ulrich, was haunted by the thoughts which his own words had called up in him. It was possible, it was always possible, that if she ever knew, she might divorce him, and the children would become bastards. The Law would certainly give her her divorce, and the Church also. The most severe of judges, the most austere of pontiffs, would not hold her bound to a man who had so grossly deceived her.

By his own act he had rendered it possible for her, if she knew, to sever herself entirely from him, and make his sons nameless. Of course he had always known this. But in the first ardours of his passion, the first ecstasies of his triumph, he had scarcely thought of it. He had been certain that Vassia Kazán was dead to the whole world. Then, as the years had rolled on, the security of his position, the calmness of his happiness, had lulled all this remembrance in him. But now tranquillity had departed from him, and there were hours when an intense dread possessed him.

True, he did justice to the veracity and honour of his foe. He

believed that Vàsàrhely would never speak whilst he himself was living; but then again he himself might die at any moment, a gun accident, a false step on a glacier, a thrust from a boar or a bear, ten thousand hazards might kill him in full health, and were he dead his antagonist might be tempted to break his word. Vàsàrhely had always loved her; would it not be a temptation beyond the power of humanity to resist, when by a word he could show to her that she had been betrayed and outraged by a traitor?

And then the children?

Though were he himself dead, she would in all likelihood never do aught that would let the world know his sin, yet she would surely change to his offspring, most probably would hate them when she saw in their lives only the evidence of her own dishonour, and knew that in their veins was the blood of a man born a serf.

'Born a serf! I!' he thought, incredulous of his own memories, of his own knowledge, as he left the haras and mounted a young half-broken English horse, and rode out into the silent, fragrant forest ways. Almost to himself it seemed a dream that he had ever been a little peasant on the Volga plains. Almost to himself it seemed an impossible fable that he had been the natural son of Paul Zabaroff and a poor maiden who had deemed herself honoured when she had been bidden to bear drink to the *barine* in his bedchamber. He had once said that he was the best of all actors, one who believes in the part he plays; and at all times, and above all since his marriage, he had been identified in his own persuasions, and his own instincts and habits, with that character of a great noble, which, when he paused to remember, he knew was but assumed. Patrician in all his temper and tone, it seemed to him, when he did so remember, incredible that he could be actually only a son of hazard, without name, right, or station in the world. Was he even the husband of Wanda von Szalras? Law and Church would both deny it were his fraud once known.

It was not very often that these gloomy terrors seized him—his temper was elastic and his mind sanguine; but when they did so they overcame him utterly; he felt like Orestes pursued by the Furies. What smote him most deeply and hardly of all was his consciousness of the wrong done to his wife.

He rode fast and recklessly in the soft, grey atmosphere of the still day, making his young horse leap brawling stream and fallen tree-trunk, and dash headlong through the dusky greenery of the forests.

When he returned Wanda was seated on the lawn under the great yews and cedars by the keep. She kissed her hand to him as he rode in the distance up the avenue.

A little while later he joined her in her garden retreat, calm and even gay. With her greeting his terror seemed to have faded away; his home was here, he possessed her entire devotion—what

was there to fear? Never had the serenity of his life here appeared more precise to him; never had the respect and honour which surrounded him seemed more needful as the bulwarks of a contented career. What could the furnace of ambition, the fatigue of exhausted pleasure give, that could equal this profound sense of peace, this cultured leisure, and this untainted atmosphere? The moral loveliness of his wife seemed to him almost more than mortal in its absolute and unconscious rejection of all things mean or base. 'The world would find the spring by following her,' seemed to him to have been written for her—the spring of hope, of faith, of strength, of purity. Perhaps a better man might have less intensely perceived and worshipped that spiritual beauty.

'Shall we have any house-parties this year or not?' she asked him, as he joined her. 'I fear you must feel lonely here after your crowded days in Paris last year?'

'No,' he said quickly. 'Let us be without people. We had enough of the world in Paris, too much of it? How can I be lonely whilst I have you? And the weather for once is superb, and promises to remain so.'

'I do not know how it seems to you,' she replied, 'but when I came from the glare and the asphalte of Paris, these deep shadows, these cool fresh greens, these cloud-bathed mountains seemed to me to have the very calm of eternity in them. They seemed to say to me in such reproach, "Why will you wander? What can you find nobler and gladder than we are?" I want the children to grow up with that love of country in them; it is such a refuge, such an abiding, innocent joy. What does the old English poet say: 'It is to go from the world as it is man's to the world as it is God's.'

> 'Well, then, I now do plainly see
> This busy world and I shall ne'er agree,'

he said, with a smile. 'Cowley was a very wise man; wiser than Socrates, when all is counted. But, then, Cowley forgot, and you, perhaps, forget that one must be born with that wiser, holier love in one; like any other poetic faculty or insight, it is scarcely to be taught, certainly not to be acquired. I hope your children may inherit it from you. There is no surer safeguard, no simpler happiness.'

'But since you are content, may it not be acquired?'

'Ah, my beloved!' he said with a sigh. 'Do not compare the retreat of the soldier tired of his wounds, of the gambler wearied by his losses, with the poet or the saint who is at peace with himself and sees all his life long what he at least believes to be the smile of God. Loyola and Francis d'Assisi are not the same thing, are not on the same plane.'

'What matter what brought them,' she said softly, 'if they reach the same goal?'

'You think any sin may be forgiven?' he said irrelevantly, with his face averted.

'That is a very wide question. I do not think S. Augustine himself could answer it in a word or in a moment. Forgiveness, I think, would surely depend on repentance.'

'Repentance in secret—would that avail?'

'Scarcely—would it?—if it did not involve some sacrifice. It would have to prove its sincerity to be accepted.'

'You believe in public penance?' said Sabran, with some impatience and contempt.

'Not necessarily public,' she said, with a sense of perplexity at the turn his words had taken. 'But of what use is it for one to say he repents unless in some measure he makes atonement?'

'But where atonement is impossible?'

'That could never be.'

'Yes. There are crimes whose consequences can never be undone. What then? Is he who did them shut out from all hope?'

'I am no casuist,' she said, vaguely troubled. 'But if no atonement were possible, I still think—nay, I am sure—a sincere and intense regret, which is, after all, what we mean by repentance, must be accepted, must be enough.'

'Enough to efface it in the eyes of one who had never sinned?'

'Where is there such a one? I thought you spoke of heaven.'

'I spoke of earth. It is all we can be sure to have to do with; it is our one poor heritage.'

'I hope it is but an antechamber which we pass through, and fill with beautiful things, or befoul with dust and blood, at our own will.'

'Hardly at our own will. In your antechamber a capricious tyrant waits us all at birth. Some come in chained; some free.'

They were seated at her favourite garden-seat, where the great yews spread before the keep, and far down below the Szalrassee rippled away in shining silver and emerald hues, bearing the Holy Isle upon its waters, and parting the mountains as with a field of light. The impression which had pursued her once or twice before came to her now. Was there any error in his own life, any cruel, crooked twist of circumstance concealed from her? An exceeding tenderness and pity yearned in her towards him as the thought arose. Was he, with all his talent, power, pride, grace, and strength, conscious of fault or failure, weighted with any burden? It seemed impossible. Yet to her fine instinct, her accurate ear, there was in these generalities the more painful, the more passionate, tone of personal remorse. She might have spoken, might once more have said to him what she had once said, and invited him to place a fearless confidence in her

affection; but she remembered Olga Brancka; she shrank from seeking an avowal which might be so painful to him and her alike.

At that moment the pretty figure of the Princess Ottilie appeared in the distance, a lace hood over her head, a broad red sunshade held above that, and Sabran rose to go forward and offer her his arm.

'You are always lovers still, and one is afraid of interrupting you,' she said, as she took one of the gilded wicker chairs. 'I have had a letter from Olga Brancka; the post is come in. She says she will honour you in the autumn on her way to waiting at Gödöllö.'

'It is impossible!' cried Sabran, who grew first red, then pale.

'Nothing is impossible with Olga,' said the Princess, drily. 'I see even yet you are not acquainted with her many qualities, which include among them a will of steel.'

'She cannot come here,' he said in haste under his breath.

Wanda looked at him a moment.

'My aunt shall tell her that it will not suit us. She can go to Gödöllö by way of Gratz,' she said quietly.

The Princess shifted her sunshade.

'What effect do you think that will have? She will cross your mountains, and she will call up a snowstorm by incantation, so that you will be compelled to take her in. You who know so much of the world, René, can you inform me how it is that women possess tenacity of will in precise proportion to the frivolity of their lives? All these butterflies have a volition of iron.'

'It is egotism,' he replied with effort, unable to recover his astonishment and disgust. 'Intensely selfish people are always very decided as to what they wish. That is in itself a great force; they do not waste their energies in considering the good of others.'

'Olga's energies are certainly not wasted in that direction,' said Mdme. Ottilie.

Sabran rose and went in for his letters. It was intolerable to him to hear the name of this woman, whom he had only escaped by brutal violence, spoken in the presence of his wife; and even to him, hardened to the vices of the world though experience had made him, it had never occurred as possible that she would have the audacity to come thither; he had too hastily taken it for granted that conscience would have kept her clear of their path for ever, unless the hazards of society should have brought them perforce together. The most secretive of men is always more sincere than an insincere and crafty woman, and he was overwhelmed for the moment at the infamy and the hardihood of a character which he had flattered himself he had understood at a glance. He forgot the truth that 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'

'There is not a *déclassée* in Paris who would not have more decency!' he thought bitterly. He stood in the Rittersäal and affected to be occupied with his letters; but his eyes only followed their lines, his mind was absent. He saw no way to prevent her continued intimacy with them, if she were vile enough to persist in enforcing it. He could not tell Egon Vàsàrhely or Stefan Brancka; a man cannot betray a woman, however base she may be. He could not tell his wife of that hateful hour, which seemed burnt into his brain as aquafortis bites into metal. He shuddered as he thought of her here, in this house which had known so many centuries of honour. He cursed the weak and culpable folly which had first led him into her snares. If he had not dallied with this Delilah, she would have been vile of purpose and of nature in vain. He had escaped her indeed at the last; he had indeed remained faithful in act to his wife; but had it been such fidelity of the soul and the mind as she deserved? Would not even the semi-betrayal bring its punishment soon or late? Could he ever endure to see her beside the woman who so nearly had tempted him? He felt that he would sooner kill the other, as he had threatened, rather than let her set her foot across the sacred threshold of Hohenszalras.

'I knew what she was,' he thought with endless self-accusation. 'Why did I ever loiter an hour by her side, why did I ever look once at her hateful eyes?'

If she had been a stranger he would have braved his wife's scorn of himself and told her all, but when it was her cousin's wife—one who even had once been in a still nearer relationship to her—he could not do it. It seemed to him as if such nearness of shame would be so horrible to her that he would be included in her righteous hatred of it.

Moreover, long habit had made him reticent, and silence always seemed to him safety.

After some meditation he took his way to the library and there wrote a brief letter. He said in it, with no preamble, ceremony, or courtesy, that he begged to decline for himself and his wife the honour of the Countess Brancka's presence at Hohenszalras. He sealed it with his arms, and sent a special messenger with it to Matrey. He said nothing of what he had done to his wife or her aunt.

He knew that if his antagonist were so disposed she could make feud between him and her husband for the insult which that curt rejection of her offered visit bore with it. But that did not weigh on him; he would have been glad to have a man to deal with in the matter. All he cared to do was to preserve his home from the pollution of her presence. Moreover, he knew that it would not be like the *finesse* and secresy of Olga Brancka to do aught so simple or so frank as to seek the support of her lord.

Meantime, the Princess was saying to his wife:

'Will you receive Olga? She will not give up her wishes; she will force her way to you.'

'How can I refuse to receive Stefan's wife?'

'It would be difficult, but you would be justified. She endeavoured to draw your husband into an intrigue.'

'Are we sure? Let us be charitable.'

'My dear Wanda, you are a truer Christian than I am.'

'Justice existed before Christianity, if you do not think me profane to say so. I try to be just.'

'Justice is blind,' said the Princess, drily. 'I never understood very well how, being so, she can see her own scales.'

Wanda made no reply. She had not been blind, but she would have never said to any living being all that she had suffered in those weeks when he had stayed behind her in Paris. That he had returned to her blameless she was certain; she had put far behind her for ever the remembrance of those the only hours of anxiety and pain which he had given her since their marriage.

The Princess, communing with herself, wrote a letter to the Countess Brancka, chill and austere, in which she conveyed in delicate, but sufficiently clear, language, her sense that the same roof should not shelter her and Sabran, especially when the roof was that of Hohenszalras. She sent it because she believed it to be her duty to do so, but she had little faith in its efficacy. She would have written also to Stefan Brancka, but she knew him to be a weak, indulgent, careless man, still young, who had been lenient to his wife's follies and frailties, and who was only kept from ruin by the strong hand of his brother. If she told him what was after all mere conjecture, he might only laugh; if he did not laugh he might kill Sabran in a duel, were his Magyar blood fired by suspicion. No one could be ever sure what Count Stefan would or would not do; the only thing sure was that he would be never wise. To his wife herself he was absolutely indifferent, but this did not prevent him from having occasional moods of furious resentment against her. He was too unstable and too perilous a person to resort to in any difficulty.

In a few days she received her answer, though Sabran received none. It was brief and playful and pathetic.

'Beloved and reverend Mother,—You never like me, you always lecture me, but I am glad that you honour me by remembrance, even if it be to upbraid. I know not of what mysterious crime you suspect me, nor do I understand your allusions to M. de Sabran. I have always found him charming, and I think if he had not married so rich a woman he would have been eminent in some way; but content slays ambition. Salute Wanda lovingly and the pretty children. How is your little Ottilie? My Mila and Marie are grown out of knowledge. We shall soon have to

be thinking of their *dots*—alas! where will these come from? Stefan and I have been the prey of unjust stewards and extortionate tradesfolk till scarce anything is left except the mine at Schermnitz. Pity me a little, and pray for me much.

'Your ever devoted

'OLGA.'

Princess Ottilie was a holy woman, and knew that rage was a sin against herself and Heaven, but when she had read this note she tore it in a hundred pieces, and stamped her small foot upon it, trembling with passion the while.

Two months went on; the Countess Olga wrote no more; they deemed themselves delivered from her threatened presence. She had not replied to his refusal to permit her to come thither, and Sabran felt relieved from an intolerable position. Had she persisted, he had decided to make full confession to his wife rather to permit her to receive ignorantly the insult of such a visit.

It was now the end of September, and the weather remained fine and open. He spent a great deal of his time out of doors, and took his old interest in the forests, the stud, and the hunting. The letter of Olga Brancka had brought close to him again the peril from which he had so hardly escaped in Paris, and the peace and sweetness of his home-life seemed the more precious to him by contrast. The high intelligence, the serene temper of his wife, and her profound affection seemed to him treasures for which he could be never grateful enough to fate and fortune; their days passed in tranquil and sunny happiness; but ever and again a word, a look, the merest trifle, sufficed to awake the sleeping snake of remorse which was dormant in his breast.

One day he took Bela with him when he rode—a rare honour for the child, who rode superbly. His pony kept fair pace with his father's English hunter, and even the leaping did not scare either it or its rider.

'Bravo, Bela!' said Sabran, when they at last drew rein; 'you ride like a centaur. Is your education advanced enough to know what centaurs were?'

'Oh! they were what I should love to be,' replied Bela, rapturously. 'They were joined on to the horse!'

Sabran laughed. 'Well, a good rider is one with his horse, so you may come very near your ideal. Ulrich has taught you an admirable seat. You are worthy of your mother in the saddle.'

Bela coloured with pleasure.

'In the study you are not so, I fear?' Sabran continued. 'You do not like learning, do you?'

'I like some sorts,' said the child with a little timidity; 'I like history, knowing what the people did in the other ages. Now the Herr Professor lets us do our lessons out of doors, I do not mind

them at all. As for Gela, he likes nothing but books and pictures,' he added, with a sense of his one grief against his brother.

'Happy Gela! whatever his fate in life he will never be alone,' said his father, as he dismounted to let his hunter take breathing space. The child leapt lightly from his saddle, took his little silver folding cup out of his pocket, and drank at a spring, one of the innumerable springs rushing over the mossy stones and flower-filled grass.

'One is never alone with horses?' he said shyly, for he never lost his awe of Sabran.

'Unless one be ill; then a horse is sorry consolation, and books and art are faithful companions.'

'I have never been ill,' said Bela, with a little wonder at himself. 'I do not know what it is like.'

'It is to be dependent upon others. A hero or a king grows as helpless as a lame beggar when he is ill; you will not escape the common lot; and when you stay in your bed, and your pony in his stall, then you will be glad of Gela and his books.'

'Oh! I do love Gela always,' said the child hastily and generously; 'and the Herr Professor says he is ever—ever—so much cleverer than I am; a million times more clever!'

'You are clever enough,' said Sabran. 'If you do not let yourself be vain and overbearing you will do well. Try and remember that if your pony made a false step to-day and you fell badly, all your good health would vanish at a stroke, and all your greatness would serve you nothing. You would envy any one of the boys going with whole limbs up into the hills, and, perhaps, all your mother's love and wealth could do nothing to mend your bones again.'

Bela listened with a grave face; when women, even his fearless mother, spoke to him in such a way, he was apt to think with disdain that they over-rated danger because they were women; and when his tutor so addressed him, he was also apt to think that it was because the good professor was a bookworm and cared for weeds, stones, and butterflies. But when his father said so, he was awed; he had heard Ulrich and Otto tell a hundred stories of their lord's prowess and courage and magnificent strength, for the deeds of Sabran in the floods and on the mountains had become almost legendary in their heroism to all the mountaineers of the Hohe Tauern, and all the dwellers on the Danube forest.

'But ought one not to be brave?' he said with hesitation. 'You are.'

'We ought to be brave, certainly, or we are not fit to live; but we must not be vain of being brave, nor rely upon it too much. Courage is a mere gift of'—he was about to say 'chance,' but seeing the blue eyes of the child fastened upon him, changed the word and said 'a gift of God.'

'What a handsome boy he is!' he thought, as he looked thus at

his little son. 'And how wise it is to leave children wholly to their mothers when their mothers are wise!'

'I will remember,' said Bela thoughtfully; 'when I am a man I want to be just what you are.'

Sabran turned away at the innocent words. 'Be what your mother's people were, and I shall be content,' he said gravely.

'But your people too,' said Bela; 'they were very great and very good. The Herr Professor reads us things out of that big book on Mexico, and the Marquis Xavier was a saint, he says. Gela likes the book better than I because it is all about birds, and beasts, and flowers; but the part about the Indians, and the Incas, that pleases me; and then there are the Breton stories too that are in real history, they are quite beautiful, and I would die like that.'

Bela's tongue once loosened seldom paused of its own accord; his eyes were dark and animated, his face was eager and proud.

'The Marquis Xavier was a saint, indeed,' said his father abruptly. 'Revere his name. All my children should revere his name and memory. But lean most to your mother's people; you are Austrian born, and the chief of your duties and possessions will be in Austria. I think you would die heroically, my boy, but you will find that it is harder to live so. The horses are rested, let us ride home; it grows late for you.

Bela, whose mind was quick in intuition, felt that his father did not care to talk about Mexico or Bretagne.

'I will ask the Herr Professor if I did wrong to speak to him of the big book,' he said to himself as he mounted his pony; he was very anxious to please his father, but he was afraid he had missed the way. 'I suppose it is because they were only saints, and the Szalras were all soldiers,' he thought on reflection, soldiers being by far the foremost in his esteem.

'He says it is harder to live well than to die well,' said Bela over his bread and milk that night to his brother.

'I suppose that is because dying is over so soon,' said the meditative Gela; 'and you know it must take an *enormous* time to live to be old—quite old—like Aunt Ottilie.'

'I should like to die very grandly,' said Bela with shining eyes, 'and have all the world remember me for ever and for ever, as they do great Rudolph.'

'I should like to die saving somebody,' said Gela, 'just as Uncle Bela saved the pilgrims; that would please our mother best.'

'I should like to die in battle,' said the living Bela; 'and that would please our mother, because so many of us have always died so fighting the French, or the Prussians, or the Turks. When I am a man I shall die like Wallenstein.'

'But Wallenstein was killed in a room,' said Gela, who was very accurate.

'You are always so particular!' said Bela impatiently, who had himself only a vague idea of Wallenstein, as of some one who had gone on fighting without stopping for thirty years.

'The Herr Professor says it is just being particular which makes the difference between the scholar and the sciolist,' said Gela solemnly, his pretty rosy lips closing carefully over the long word *halbgelehrte.*

This night after the ride he and she dined quite alone. As he sat in the Rittersäal and looked at the long line of knights, the many blazoned shields, the weapons borne in gallant warfare, a sudden sensation came to him of the vile thing that he did in being in this place. It seemed to him that those armoured figures should grow animate and descend and drive him out. Bela, then sleeping happily, dreaming of the glories of his ride, had raised with his innocent words a torturing spirit in his father's breast. What had he brought to this haughty and chivalrous race?—the servile Slav, the barbaric Persian, blood, and all the dishonour that their creed would hold the basest upon earth. Besides, to lie to *her* children! Even the blue eyes of the boy had made him embarrassed and humiliated, as if she were judging him through her first-born's gaze. What would it be when that child, grown to man's estate, should speak to him of his people, of his forefathers?

For the first time it occurred to him that these boys would inevitably, as they grew older, ask him many questions, wish to know many things. He could turn aside a child's inquisitive interest, but it would be more painful, less easy, to refuse to supply a grown youth's legitimate interrogations. All these children would some time or another make many inquiries of him that his wife, out of delicate sympathy, never had intruded upon him. The fallen fortunes of the Sabran race had always seemed to her one of those blameless misfortunes for which the best respect is shown by silence. But her sons would naturally, one day or another, be more interested in learning more of those from whom they were descended.

The lie in reply would be easy and secure. There were all the traditions and recollections of the Sabrans of Romaris to be gathered from the tongues of the people in Finisterre, and the private papers of their race which he possessed. He could answer well enough, but it would be a lie, and a lie seemed to him now a disgrace. Before his marriage he had looked on falsehood as a necessary part of the world's furniture, but he had not lived all these years beside a noble nature, to which even a prevarication was impossible, without growing ashamed of his former laxities.

'There is not a dead man amongst all those knights who bore these arms that should not rise to punish and disown me!' he thought with poignant hatred of his past.

When he went to his room the impulse once more came over him to tell his wife all; to throw himself on her mercy, and let

her do the worst she would; but he had a certain fear of her which acted like a spell on that moral cowardice, which his Slav temperament and his hidden secret combined to bind in a dead weight on the physical courage and natural pride of his character.

He resolved to do his uttermost as they grew older to rear his sons to worthiness of that great race whose name they bore; to uproot in them by all means in his power any falser or darker faults they might have inherited from him. He promised himself so to watch over his own words and deeds that as they grew to manhood they should find no palliative or example of wrong-doing in his life. The closeness of his peril, the folly of his dalliance with Olga Brancka, had left him distrustful and diffident of his own powers to resist evil. He said to himself that he would seek the world no more; his wife was happiest in her own dominion, amidst her own people; he would court neither pleasure nor ambition again. Here he had peace; here he loved and was beloved; here he would abide, and let courts and cities hold those less blessed than he.

In the morning he awoke refreshed and tranquil; a beautiful sunrise was tinging with rose the snows of the opposite Venediger peaks; the flush of early autumn was upon the lower woods, but no snow had fallen even on the mountains. The lake was deeply green as a laurel leaf, and its waters rolled briskly under a strong breeze. It was a brilliant day for the hills, and the *jägermeister* and his men were in waiting, for he had arranged over night to go chamois-hunting on those steep alps and glaciers which towered above the hindmost forests of Hohenszalras. He did not very often give rein to his natural love of field sports, for he knew that his wife liked to feel that the innocent creatures of the mountains were safe wherever she ruled. But there was real sport to be had here, with every variety of danger accompanying it to excuse it, and Otto and his men were proud of their lord's prowess and perseverance on the high hills, and only sorrowed that he so often let his rifles lie unused in the gun-room. He went out whilst the day was still red and young, like a rose yet in bud, and climbed easily and willingly the steep paths and precipitous slopes which led to the glaciers.

'Count Bela wants sadly to come with us one of these days,' said Otto, with a broad smile. 'He can use his crampons right manfully; will not the Countess soon let me teach him to shoot?'

'I think not willingly, Otto,' said Sabran. 'She thinks children's hands are best free of bloodshed; and so do I. It can do a child no good to see the dying agony of an innocent creature. Teach Herr Bela to climb as much as you like, but leave powder and shot alone.'

'I am sure the Herr Marquis himself must have been a fine shot very early?'

'I was at a semi-military college,' said Sabran, thinking of

those days at the Lycée Clovis when he had sought the *salle d'armes* with such eagerness, as being the scene of those lessons which would most surely enable him to meet men as their equal or their master.

'If only Count Bela might be taught to shoot at a mark?' said the old huntsman, wistfully.

'You know very well, Otto, that your lady decides everything for her children, and that all her decisions I uphold,' said his master. 'Be sure they are wiser than either yours or mine would be. She can teach him herself, too; she can hit a running mark as well as you or I. Do you remember the day when you arrested me in these woods?'

'Ah, my lord!' said Otto, with a rolling oath; 'never can I pardon myself, though you have so mercifully pardoned me!'

'And my good rifle is still lying in the bed of the lake,' said Sabran, glancing backward at the Szalrassee, now many hundred feet below them, a mere green ribbon shining through the deeper green of fir and pine woods.

'Yes, my lord!' answered the man, cheerily. 'The good English rifle indeed was lost; but it seems to me that the Herr Marquis did not make wholly a bad exchange!'

'No, indeed,' said his master, as he paused and looked down to where the towers and spires of Hohenszalras glimmered like mere points of glittering metal in the sunshine far below.

They were now at the highest altitude at which *gemsbocks* are found, and the business of the day commenced as they sighted what looked like a mere brown speck against the greyness of the opposite glacier. Before the day was done Sabran had shot to his own gun eight chamois on the heights, and some score of ptarmigan and black-cock on the lower level. He saw more than one *kuttengeier* and *lammergeier*, but, in deference to the traditions of the Szalras, did not fire on them. The healthful fatigue, the rarefied air, the buoyant exhilaration which comes with the atmosphere of the great heights, made him feel happy, and gave him back all his confidence in the present and the future. When he rested on a ledge of rock, listening to Otto's hunter's tales, and making a frugal meal of some hard biscuit and a draught of Voslauer, he wondered at himself for having so recently been beguiled by the febrile excitations of Paris, or having desired the fret and wear of a public career. What could be better than this life was? To have sought to leave it was folly and ingratitude. The peace and the calm of the great mountains which she loved so well seemed to descend into his soul.

It was twilight when they reached the lower slopes of the hills, the jägers loaded with game, he and Otto walking in front of them. From the still far-off islet on the lake, and from the belfry of the Schloss, the Ave Maria was chiming; the deep-toned bells of the latter ringing the Emperor's Hymn.

Talking gaily with Otto, with that frank kindliness which endeared him to all these mountaineers, he approached the house slowly, fatigued with the pleasant tire of a healthy and vigorous man after a long day's pastime on the hills, and entered by a back entrance, which led through the stables into the wing of the building where his own private rooms were situated. He took his bath and dressed himself for the evening, then went on his way across the vast house to the white salon, where his wife and her aunt were usually to be found at the time of her children's hour before dinner. With some words on his lips to claim her praise for having spared the vultures, he pushed aside the *portière* and entered, but the words died on his tongue, half spoken.

His wife was there; but before the hearth, seated with her profile turned towards him, also was Olga Brancka. His wife, who was standing, came towards him.

'My cousin Olga took us by surprise an hour ago. The telegram must have missed us which she says she sent yesterday from Salzburg.'

Her eyes had a cold gaze as she spoke; her sense of the duties of hospitality and of high breeding had alone compelled her to give any form of welcome to her guest. Mdme. Brancka, playing with a feather screen, looked up with a little quiet self-satisfied smile.

'Unexpected guests are the most welcome. When there is an old proverb, pretty if musty, all ready made for you, Réné, why do you not repeat it? I am truly sorry, though, that my telegram miscarried. I suspect it comes from Wanda's old-fashioned prejudice against having a wire of her own here from Lienz. I dare say they never send you half your messages.'

Sabran had mechanically bowed over the hand she held out to him, but he scarcely touched it with his own. He was deadly pale. The amazement that her effrontery produced on him was stupefaction. Versed in the ways of women and of the world though he was, he was speechless and helpless before this incredible audacity. She looked at him, she smiled, she spoke, like the most innocent and unconscious creature. For a moment an impulse seized him to unmask her then and there, and hound her out of his wife's presence; the next he knew that it was impossible to do so. Men cannot betray women in that way, nor was he even wholly free enough from blame himself to have the right to do so. But an intense rage, the more intense because perforce mute, seized him against this intruder by his hearth. Only to see her beside his wife was an intolerable suffering and shame. When he recovered himself a little, feeling his wife's gaze upon him, he said with some plain incredulity in his contemptuous words:

'The failure of messages is often caused by the senders of them; the people are extremely careful at Lienz. I do not think the fault lies *there*. We can, however, only regret the want of due warn-

ing, for the reason that we can give no fit or flattering reception of an honoured guest. You come from Paris?'

For the first time a slight sudden flush rose upon Olga Brancka's cheek, callous though she was. She felt the irony and the disdain. She perceived that she had in him an inexorable foe, beyond all allurement and all entreaty.

'I passed by Paris,' she answered, easily enough. 'Of course I had to see my tailors, like every one else in September. I have been first to Noissetiers, then to London, then to Homburg, then to Russia. I do not know where I have not been since we met. And you good people have been vegetating beneath your forests all that time? I was curious to come and see you in your felicity. Hohenszalrasburg used to be called the vulture's nest; it appears to have become a dove's!'

'I spared a whole family of *lammergeier* to-day in deference to your forest law,' he said, turning to his wife, whilst to himself he thought what a far worse beast of prey was sitting here, smoothing her glossy feathers in the warmth of his own hearth. Wanda noticed the extreme pallor of his face, the sound of anger and emotion forcibly restrained; she imagined something of what he felt, though she could guess neither its intensity nor its extent. She had done herself violence in meeting with courtesy and tranquillity the woman who now sat between them, but she could not measure or imagine the guilt and the audacity of her.

When, that evening, as twilight came on, she had heard the sound of wheels beneath the terraces, and in a little while had been informed by Hubert that the Countess Brancka had arrived, her first movement had been to refuse to receive her, her next to remember that to one who had been Gela's wife, and now was Stefan Brancka's, the doors of Hohenszalras could not be shut without an open quarrel and scandal, which would regale the world and make feud inevitable between her husband and the whole race of Vàsàrhely. The Vàsàrhely knew the worthlessness of Stefan's wife, but for the honour of their name they could never admit that they did so; they would never fail to defend her. Moreover, hospitality of a high and antique type had always been the first of obligations upon all those whom she descended from and represented. They would not have refused to harbour their worst foe if he had demanded asylum. They would not have turned away sovereign or beggar from their gates. Those days were gone, indeed, but their high and generous temper lived in her. In the brief space in which Hubert, having made the announcement, waited for her commands, she had struggled with her own repugnance and conquered it. She had told herself that to turn Stefan's wife from her doors would be the mere vulgar melodrama of a common and undignified anger. After all she knew nothing; therefore she traversed the house to receive her unasked guest, and gave her welcome without any pretence of

cordiality or friendship, but with a perfect and unhesitating politeness void of all offence.

She was thankful that the Princess Ottilie was again in the south of France with her sister-in-law of Lilienhöhe, so that her indignation, her interrogation, and her quick regard were spared to them. Now that her niece was no longer alone, the Princess did not think it her bounden duty to endure these northern winds, blowing from Poland and the Baltic over the old duchy of Austria, which she had at all times so peculiarly detested, though she had been born a thousand miles nearer the Baltic herself.

Olga Brancka had been profuse in her apologies and expressions of regret, but she had at once let her carriage, hired at S. Johann, with its four post-horses changed at Matrey, be taken to the stables, and had gone herself to her old apartments, where in little time her two maids had altered her heavy furs and travelling clothes to the costume of consummate simplicity and elegance in which she now sat, putting forth her small feet in rose satin shoes to the warmth from the great Hirchvogel stove, which, with its burnished and enamelled colour, illumined one side of the white salon.

Sabran and his wife both remained standing, he leaning his arm on the scroll-work of the great stove, she playing with the delicate ears of one of the hounds. Mdme. Brancka alone sat and leaned back in her low seat, quite content; she was aware that she was unwelcome, and that her presence was an embarrassment and worse. But the sense of the wrong and cruel position in which she placed them was sweet and pungent to her; she was refreshed by the very sense of dilemma and of danger which surrounded her. She had her vengeance in her hand, and she would not exhaust it quickly, but tasted its savour with the slow care and patient appetite of the connoisseur in such things. She had a Chinese-like skill in patiently drawing out the prolonged pangs of an ingeniously invented martyrdom.

'Why do you both stand?' she said, looking up at him between her half-closed lids. 'Are you standing to imply to me as we do with monarchs, "This house is yours whilst you are in it?" I am much obliged, but I should sell it at once if it were really mine. It is a splendid, barbaric solitude, like Taróc. We have not been to Taróc this year. Stefan says Egon lives altogether with his troopers and grows very morose. You hear from him sometimes, I suppose?'

To Sabran it seemed as if her half-shut black eyes shot forth actual sparks of fire, as she spoke the name which he could never hear without an inward spasm of fear.

'Of course I hear from Egon,' said his wife. 'But he writes very briefly; he was never much of a penman. He prefers a rifle, a sword, a riding-whip.'

'I hear you have called the last child after him? Where are

the boys? They cannot be in bed. Let me see them. It is surely their hour to be here. Réné, ring, and send for them.'

His brow contracted.

'No; it is late,' he said abruptly. 'They would only weary you; they are barbaric, like the house.'

He felt an extreme reluctance to bring his children into her presence, to see her speak to them, touch them; he was longing passionately to seize her and thrust her out of the doors. As she sat there in the full light of the many wax candles burning around, sparkling, imperturbable, like a coquette of a vaudeville, with her rose satin, and her white taffetas, and her lace ruff, and her pink coral necklace and ear-rings, and a little pink coral hand upholding her curls in the most studied disorder, she seemed to him the loathliest thing that he had ever seen. He hated her more intensely than he had ever hated any one in all his life; even more than he had hated the traitress who had sold him to the Prussians.

'Pray let me see the children; I know you never dine till eight,' she was persisting to his wife, who knew well that she was entirely indifferent to the children, but who was not unwilling for their entrance to break the constraint of what was to her an intolerable trial. She did ring, and ordered their presence. They soon came, making their obeisances with the pretty grave courtliness which they were taught from infancy; the boys in white velvet dresses, while their sister, in a frock of old Venetian point, looked like a Stuart child painted by Vandyck.

'*Ah, quels amours*!' cried Olga Brancka, with admirable effusion, as they kissed her hand. Sabran turned away abruptly, and muttering a word as to some orders he had to give the stud-groom, left the chamber without ceremony, as she, with an ardour wholly unknown to her own daughters, lifted the little Ottilie on her knee and kissed the child's rose-leaf cheek.

'What lovely creatures they are!' she said in German; 'and how they have grown since they left Paris! They are all the image of Réné; he must be very proud. They have all his eyes—those deep dark-blue eyes, like jewels, like the depths of the sea.'

'You are very poetic,' said Wanda; 'but I should be glad if you would speak their praises in some tongue they do not understand. The boys may not be hurt; but Lili, as we call her, is a little vain already, though she is so young.'

'Would you deny her the birthright of her sex?' said Mdme. Brancka, clasping her coral necklace round the child's throat. 'Surely she will have lectures enough from her godmother against all feminine foibles. By the way, where is the Princess?'

'My aunt is with the Lilienhöhe.'

'I am grieved not to have the pleasure,' murmured Mdme. Brancka, indifferently, letting Ottilie glide from her lap.

'Give back the necklace, *liebling*,' said Wanda, as she unclasped it.

'No, no; I entreat you—let her keep it. It is leagues too large, but she likes it, and when she grows up she will wear it and think of me.'

'Pray take it,' said Wanda, lifting it from the child's little breast. 'You are too kind; but they must not be given what they admire. It teaches them bad habits.'

'What severe rules!' cried Madame Brancka. 'Are these poor babies brought up on S. Chrysostom and S. Basil? Is Lili already doomed to the cloister? You are too austere; you should have been an abbess instead of having all these golden-curled cupidons about you. Where is the youngest one, Egon's namesake?'

'He is in his cot,' said Gela, who was always very direct in his replies, and who found himself addressed by her.

Meantime Bela took hold of his mother's hand and whispered to her, '*Mütterchen*, she is rude to you. Send her away.'

'My darling,' answered Wanda, 'when people laugh in our own house we must let them do it, even if it be at ourselves. And, Bela, to whisper is *very* rude.'

'Egon is so little,' continued Gela, plaintively. 'He cannot read; I do not think he ever will read!'

'But you could not when you were as small as he?'

'Could I not?' said Gela, doubtfully, to whom that time seemed many centuries back.

'And Lili, can she read?' said Mdme. Olga, suppressing a yawn.

'Oh, yes,' said Gela; 'at least, two-letter words she can; and me, I read to her.'

'What model children!' cried Mdme. Brancka, with a little laugh. 'And the naughty boy who was in a rage because he was not permitted to go to Chantilly? That was Bela, was it not? Bela, do you remember how cruel your mother was, and how you cried?'

Bela looked at her, with his blue eyes growing as stern and cold as his father's.

'My mother is always right,' he said gallantly. 'She knows what I ought to do. I do not think I cried, *meine gnädige Frau*; I never cry.'

'Even the naughty boy has become an angel! What a wonderful disciplinarian you are, Wanda! If your children were not so handsome they would be insufferable with their goodness. They are very handsome; they are just like Sabran, and yet they are not at all a Russian type.'

'Why should they be Russian? We have no Russian blood,' said their mother, in surprise.

Mdme. Brancka laughed a little confusedly, and fluttered her feather screen.

'I do not know what I was thinking of. Réné always reminds me of my old friend Paul Zabaroff; they are very alike.'

'I have seen the present Prince Zabaroff,' said Wanda, wondering what the purpose of her guest's words were. 'He was not, as I remember him, much like M. de Sabran.'

'Oh, of course he was not equal to your Apollo!' said Mdme. Brancka, winding Ottilie's long hair round her fingers.

'You have had enough of them; they must not worry you,' said their mother, and she dismissed the children with a word.

'In what marvellous control you keep them!' said Mdme. Olga. 'Now, my children never obeyed me, let me scream at them as I would.'

'I do not think screaming has much effect on any one, young or old.'

'It paralyses a man. But I suppose a child can always outscream one?'

'Probably. A child never respects any person who loses his calmness. As for men, you are better versed in their follies than I.'

'But do you and Réné absolutely never quarrel?'

'Quarrel! My dear Olga, how very *bürgerlich* an idea!'

'Do you suppose only the bourgeois quarrel?' said Mdme. Brancka. 'Really you live in your enchanted forest until you forget what the world is like;' and she began an interminable history of the scenes between a friend of hers and her husband and her family, a quarrel which had ended in *conseils judiciaires* and separation. 'It is a cruel thing that there is no one law of divorce for all the world,' she said with a sigh, as she ended the unsavoury relation. 'If Stefan and I could only set each other free, we should have done it years and years ago.'

'I did not know your griefs against Stefan were so great?'

'Oh, I have no great griefs against him; he is *bon enfant*: but we are both ruined, and we both detest each other; we do not know very well why.'

'Poor Mila and Marie!'

'What has it to do with them? They are happy at Sacré Cœur, and when they come out they will marry. Egon will be sure to portion them; we cannot. We are not like you, who will be able to give a couple of millions to Lili without hurting her brothers.'

'Lili's *dot* is far enough in the future,' said Lili's mother, who, very weary of the conversation, saw with relief the doors open, and heard Hubert announce that dinner could be served. By an opposite door Sabran entered also, a moment later. The dinner was tedious to both him and her; they alike found it an almost intolerable penance. Their guest alone was gay, ironical, at her ease, and never at a loss for a topic. Sabran looked at her now and then with absolute wonder coming over him as to whether he

had not dreamed of that evening in Paris, alone beside her, with the smell of the jasmine and orange-buds, and the moonbeams crossing her white throat, her auburn curls. Was it possible that a woman lived with such incredible self-control, insolence, shamelessness? There was not a shadow of consciousness in her regard, not a moment of uneasiness in her manner. Except the one passing faint flush which had come on her face at his words of greeting, there was not a single sign that she was other than the most innocent of women. The impatience, the disgust, the amazement which were in him were too strong for his worldly tact and composure altogether to conquer them; his eyes were downcast, his words were studied or irrelevant, his discomposure was evident; he felt as reluctant to meet the gaze of his wife as of his enemy. In vain did he endeavour to sustain equably the airy nothings of the usual dinner-table conversation. He was sensible of an effort too great for art to cover it; he felt that there was a strange sound in his voice, he fancied the very men waiting upon him must be conscious of his embarrassment. If he could have turned her out of the house he would have been at peace, for, after all, her offences were much greater than his own; but to be compelled to sit motionless whilst she called his wife caressing names, broke her bread, and would sleep under her roof, was absolute torture to him.

When they went back again to the white room he sat down at the piano, glad to find a temporary refuge in music from the embarrassment of her presence.

'He cannot have spoken to Wanda?' she thought, uneasy for the first time, as she glanced at Sabran, who was playing with his usual *maestria* a concerto of Schubert's. With the plea that her long post journey had fatigued her, she asked leave to retire when half an hour had elapsed, filled with scientific and intricate melody, which had spared them the effort of further conversation. Her host and hostess accompanied her to the guest-chambers, with the courtesy which was an antique custom of the Schloss, as of all Austrian country-houses. Their leave-taking on the threshold was cold, but studied in politeness; the door closed on her, and Sabran and his wife returned along the corridor together.

His heart beat heavily with apprehension; he dreaded her next word. To his relief, to his surprise, she said simply to him:

'It is very early. I will go and write to Rothwand about the mines. Will you come and tell me again all you said about them? I have half forgotten. Or if you would rather do nothing to-night, I have other letters to look over, and I will go to my own room.'

'I will come there,' he said; and though he was well used to her strong self-control and forbearance, he felt amazed at the force of these now, and was moved to a passionate gratitude. 'Any other woman,' he thought, 'would have torn me asunder to know

what there has been between me and her guest. She does not even speak; and yet God knows how she loves me! She trusts me, and she will not weary me, nor importune me, nor seem to suspect me with doubt. Who shall be worthy of that? How can I rid her house of this insult? The other shall go; she shall go if I put her out with public shame before my servants. Would to heaven that to kill such as she is were no more murder than to slay a vicious beast or a poisonous worm!'

He followed his wife into the octagon room, where all her private papers were. There were details of a mine in Galicia which were disquieting and troublesome; on the previous day they had agreed together what to do, but before she had answered her inspector, fresh details had come in by the post-bag, whilst he had been chamois-hunting. She sat down and handed him these fresh reports.

'I do not think there is anything that will alter your decisions,' she said. 'But read them, and tell me, and I will then write.'

He drew the documents from her, and began to peruse them, but his hand shook a little as he held the papers; his eyes were not clear, his mind was not free. He laid them down and looked at her; she was seated near him. She was paler than usual and her face was grave, but she seemed quite absorbed in what she did, as she added figures together, and made a quick *précis* of the reports she had received. Her left hand lay on the table as she wrote; on the great diamond of the *bague d'alliance*, the only gift which he had presumed to offer her on their marriage, the light was sparkling; it looked like a cluster of dewdrops on a lily. He took that hand on a sudden impulse of infinite reverence, and raised it to his lips.

She looked at him, and a mist of tears came into her eyes which were tears of pleasure, of relief, of restrained emotion comforted; the gesture gave her all the reassurance that she cared to have; she was sure that Olga Brancka had never made him false to his honour and hers. She said nothing to him of what was foremost in the minds of both. She held the value of silence high. She thought that there were things of which merely to speak seemed a species of dishonour. A single word ill-said is so often the 'little rift within the lute which makes the music dumb.'

She went to rest content; but he was none the less ill at ease, disturbed, offended, and violently offended, at the presence of his temptress under the roof of Hohenszalras. It was an outrage to all he loved and respected; an outrage to which he was determined to put an end. The only possible way to do so was to see his guest himself alone. He could not visit her in her apartments; he could not summon her to his; if he waited for chance, he might wait for days. The insolence which had brought her here would probably, he reasoned, keep her here some time, and he was

resolved that she should not pass another night in the same house with his wife and his children.

Long after Wanda had gone to sleep he sat alone, thinking and perplexing himself with many a scheme, each of which he dismissed as impracticable and likely to draw that attention from his household which he most desired to avoid. He slept ill, scarcely at all, and rose before daybreak. When he was dressed he sent his man to ask Greswold to come to him. The old physician, who usually got up before the sun, soon obeyed his summons, and anxiously inquired what need there was of him.

'Dear Professor,' said Sabran, with that gracious kindliness which always won his listener's heart, 'you were my earliest friend here; you are the tutor of my sons; you are an old man, a wise man, and a prudent man. I want you to understand something without my explaining it; I do not desire or intend the Countess Brancka to be the guest of my wife for another day.'

Greswold looked up quickly; he knew the character of Stefan Brancka's wife, he guessed the rest.

'What can I do?' he said simply. 'Pray command me.'

'Do this,' said Sabran. 'Make some excuse to see her; say that the chaplain, or that my wife, has sent you, say anything you choose to get admitted to her rooms in the visitors' gallery. When you see her alone, say to her frankly, brutally if you like, that *I* say she must leave Hohenszalras. She can make any excuse she pleases, invent any despatch to recall herself; but she must go. I do not pretend to put any gloss upon it; I do not wish to do so. I want her to know that I do not permit her to remain under the same roof with my wife.'

The old physician's face grew grave and troubled; he foresaw difficulty and pain for those whom he loved, and to whom he owed his bread.

'I am to give her no explanation?' he said, doubtfully.

'She will need none,' said Sabran, curtly.

Greswold was mute. After a pause of some moments he said with hesitation:

'By all I have heard of the Countess Brancka, I am much afraid she will not be moved by such a message, delivered by any one so insignificant as myself; but what you desire me to do I will do, only I pray you do not blame me if I fail. You are, of course, indifferent to her certain indignation, to her possible violence?'

'I am indifferent to everything,' said Sabran, with rising impatience, 'except to the outrage which her presence here is to the Countess von Szalras.'

'Allow me one question, my Marquis,' said Greswold. 'Is our lady, your wife, aware that the presence of her cousin's wife is an indignity to herself?'

Sabran hesitated.

'Yes and no,' he answered at last. 'She knew something in Paris, but she does not know or imagine all, nor a tithe part, of what Mdme. Brancka is.'

'I go at once,' said the old man, without more words, 'though of course the lady will not be awake for some hours. I will ask to see her maids. I shall learn then when I can with any chance of success get admittance. You will not write a word by me? Would it not offend her less?'

'I desire to offend her,' said Sabran, with a vibration of intense passion in his voice. 'No; I will not write to her. She is a woman who has studied Talleyrand; she would hang you if she had a single line from your pen. If I wrote, God knows what evil she would not twist out of it. She hates me and she hates my wife. It must be war to the knife.'

Greswold bowed and went out, asking no more.

Sabran passed the next three hours in a state of almost uncontrollable impatience.

It was the pleasant custom at Hohenszalras for every one to have their first meal in their own apartments at any hour that they chose, but he and Wanda usually breakfasted together by choice in the little Saxe room, when the weather was cold. The cold without made the fire-glow dancing on the embroidered roses, and the gay Watteau panels, and the carpet of lamb-skins, and the coquettish Meissen shepherds and shepherdesses, seem all the warmer and more cheerful by contrast. Here he had been received on the first morning of his visit to Hohenszalras; here they had breakfasted in the early days after their marriage; here they had a thousand happy memories.

Into that room he could not go this morning. He sent his valet with a message to his wife, saying that he would remain in his own room, being fatigued from the sport of the previous day. When they brought him his breakfast he could not touch it. He drank a little strong coffee and a great glass of iced water; he could take nothing else. He paced up and down his own chambers in almost unendurable suspense. If he had been wholly innocent he would have been less agitated; but he could not pardon himself the mad imprudences and follies with which he had pandered to the vanities and provoked the passions of this hateful woman. If she refused to go he almost resolved to tell all as it had passed to his wife, not sparing himself. The three or four hours that went by after Greswold had left him appeared to him like whole, long, tedious days.

The men came as usual to him for his orders as to horses, sport, or other matters, but he could not attend to them; he hardly even heard what they said, and dismissed them impatiently. When at last the heavy, slow tread of the old physician sounded in the corridor, he went eagerly to his door, and himself admitted Greswold.

The Professor spread out his hands with a deprecating gesture.

'I have done my best. But may I never pass such a quarter of an hour again! She will not go.'

'She will not?' Sabran's face flushed darkly, his eyes kindled with deep wrath. 'She defies me, then?'

'She evidently deems herself strong enough to defy you. She laughed at me; she spoke to me as though I were one of the scullions or the sweepers; she menaced me as if we were still in the Middle Ages. In a word, she is not to be moved by me. She bade me tell you that if you wish her out of your wife's house you must have the courage to say so yourself.'

'Courage!' echoed Sabran. 'It is not courage that will be any match for her; it is not courage that will rid one of her; she knows the difficulty in which I am. I cannot betray her to her husband. No man can ever do that. I cannot risk a quarrel, a scandal, a duel with the relatives of my wife. I cannot put her out of the house as I might do if she had no relationship with the Vàsàrhely and the Szalras. She knows that; she relies upon it.'

'My lord,' said the physician very gently, 'will you pardon me one question? Is the offence done to the Countess von Szalras by Mdme. Brancka altogether on her side? Are you wholly (pardon me the word) blameless?'

'Not altogether,' said Sabran, frankly, with a deep colour on his face. 'I have been culpable of folly, but in the sense you mean I have been quite guiltless. If I had been guilty in that sense, I would not have returned to Hohenszalras!'

'I thank you for so much confidence in me,' said Greswold. 'I only wanted to know so far, because I would suggest that you should send for Prince Egon and simply tell him as much as you have told me. Egon Vàsàrhely is the soul of honour, and he has great authority over the members of his own family. He will make his sister-in-law leave here without any scandal.'

'There are reasons why I cannot take Prince Vàsàrhely into my confidence in this matter,' said Sabran, with hesitation. 'That is not to be thought of for a moment. Is there no other way?'

'See her yourself. She imagines you will not, perhaps she thinks you dare not, say these things to her yourself.'

'See her alone? What will my wife suppose?'

'Would it not be better frankly to say to my lady that you have need to see her so? Pardon me, my dear lord, but I am quite sure that the straight way is the best to take with our Countess Wanda. The only thing which she might very bitterly resent, which she might perhaps never forgive, would be concealment, insincerity, want of good faith. If you will allow me to counsel you, I would most strongly advocate your saying honestly to her that you know that of Mdme. Brancka which makes you hold her an unfit guest here, and that you are about to see that lady alone to induce her to leave the castle without open rupture.'

Sabran listened, stung sharply in his conscience by every one of the simple and honest words. When Greswold spoke of his wife as ready to pardon any offences except those of falseness and concealment his soul shrank as the flesh shrinks from the touch of caustic.

'You are right,' he said with effort. 'But, my dear Greswold, though I am not absolutely guilty, as you were led for a moment to think, I am not altogether absolutely blameless. I was sensible of the fatal attraction of an unscrupulous person. I was never faithless to my wife, either in spirit or act, but you know there are miserable sensual temptations which counterfeit passion, though they do not possess it; there are unspeakable follies from which men at no age are safe. I do not wish to be a coward like the father of mankind, and throw the blame upon a woman; but it is certain that the old answer is often still the true one, "The woman tempted me." I am not wholly innocent; I played with fire and was surprised, like an idiot, when it burnt me. I would say as much as this to my wife (and it is the whole truth) if it were only myself who would be hurt or lowered by the telling of it; but I cannot do her such dishonour as I should seem to do by the mere relation of it. She esteems me as so much stronger and wiser than I am; she has so very noble an ideal of me; how can I pull all that down with my own hands, and say to her, "I am as weak and unstable as any one of them"?'

Greswold listened and smiled a little.

'Perhaps the Countess knows more than you think, dear sir; she is capable of immense self-control, and her feeling for you is not the ordinary selfish love of ordinary women. If I were you I should tell her everything. Speak to her as you speak to me.'

'I cannot!'

'That is for you to judge, sir,' said the old physician.

'I cannot!' repeated Sabran, with a look of infinite distress. 'I cannot tell my wife that any other woman has had influence over me, even for five seconds. I think it is S. Augustine who says that it is possible, in the endeavour to be truthful, to convey an entirely false impression. An utterly false impression would be conveyed to her if I made her suppose that any other than herself had ever been loved by me in any measure since my marriage; and how should one make such a mind as hers comprehend all the baseness and fever and folly of a man's mere caprice of the senses? It would be impossible.'

Greswold was silent.

'You do not see how difficult even such a confession as that would be,' Sabran insisted, with irritation. 'Were you in my place you would feel as I feel.'

'Perhaps,' said Greswold. 'But I believe not. I believe, sir, that you underrate the knowledge of the world and of humanity which the Countess von Szalras possesses, and that you also

underrate the extent of her sympathy and the elasticity of her pardon.'

Sabran sighed restlessly.

'I do not know what to do. One thing only I know—the wife of Stefan Brancka shall not remain here.'

'Then, sir, you must be the one to say so or to write it. She will heed no one except yourself. Perhaps it is natural. I am nothing more in the sight of a great lady like that than Hubert or Otto would be. She does not think I am of fit station to go to her as your ambassador.'

'You would disown her if she were your daughter!' said Sabran, with bitter contempt. 'Well, I will see her; I will say a word to the Countess von Szalras first.'

'Say all,' suggested Greswold.

Sabran shook his head and passed quickly through the suite of sleeping and dressing chambers to the little Saxe salon, where he thought it possible that Wanda might still be. He found her there alone. She had opened one of the casements and was speaking with a gardener. The autumnal scent of wet earth and fallen leaves came into the room; the air without was cold, but sunbeams were piercing the mist; the darkness of the cedars and the yews made the airy and brilliant grace of the eighteenth-century room seem all the brighter. She herself, in a sacque of brocaded silk, with quantities of old French lace falling down it, seemed of the time of those gracious ladies that were painted on the panels. She turned as she heard his step, a red rose in her fingers which she had just gathered from the boughs about the windows.

'The last rose of the year, I am afraid, for I never count those of the hothouses,' she said, as she brought it to him.

He kissed her hand as he took it from her; she suddenly perceived the expression of distress and of preoccupation on his face.

'Is there anything the matter?' she asked; 'did you overstrain yourself yesterday on the hills?'

'No, no,' he said quickly; then added, with hesitation, 'Wanda, I have to see Mdme. Brancka alone this morning. Will you be angered, or will you trust me?'

For a moment her eyebrows drew together, and the haughtier, colder look that he dreaded came on her face; the look which came there when her children disobeyed or her stewards offended her; the look which told how, beneath the womanly sweetness and serenity of her temper, were the imperious habit and the instincts of authority inherited from centuries of dominant nobility. In another instant or two she had controlled her impulse of displeasure. She said gravely, but very gently:

'Of course I trust you. You know best what you wish, what you are called on to do. Never think that you need give explana-

tion, or ask permission to or of me. That is not the man's part in marriage.'

'But I would not have you suspect——'

'I never suspect,' she said, more haughtily. 'Suspicion degrades two people Listen, my love. In Paris I saw, I heard more than you thought. The world never leaves one in ignorance or in peace I neither suspected you nor spied upon you. I left you free. You returned to me, and I knew then that I had done wisely. I could never comprehend the passion and pleasure that some women take in hawks only kept by a hood, in hounds only held by a leash. What is allegiance worth unless it be voluntary? For the rest, if the wife of my cousin be a worse woman than I think, do not tell me so. I do not desire to know it. She was the idol of my dead brother's youth; she once entered this house as his bride. Her honour is ours.'

A flush passed over her husband's face. 'You are the noblest woman that lives,' he said, in a hushed and reverent voice. He stooped almost timidly and kissed her; then he bowed very low, as though she were a queen and he her courtier, and left her.

'That devil shall leave her house before another night is down!' he said in his own thoughts, as he took his way across the great building to Olga Brancka's apartments. He had the red autumn rose she had gathered in his hand as he went. Instinctively he slipped it within his coat as he drew near the doors of the guests' corridor; it was too sacred for him to have it made the subject of sneer or of a smile.

Wanda remained in the little Watteau room. A certain sense of fear—a thing so unfamiliar, so almost unknown to her—came upon her as the flowered satin of the door-hangings fell behind him, and his steps passed away down the passages without. The bright pictured panels of the shepherds in court suits, and the milkmaids in hoops and paniers, smiling amidst the sunny landscapes of their artificial Arcadia; the gay and courtly figures of the Meissen china, and the huge bowls filled with the gorgeous deep-hued flowers of the autumn season; the singing of a little wren perched on a branch of a yew, the distant trot of ponies' feet as the children rode along the unseen avenues, the happy barking of dogs that were going with them, the smell of wet grass and of leaves freshly dropped, the swish of a gardener's birchbroom sweeping the turf beneath the cedars—all these remained on her mind for ever afterwards, with that cruel distinctness which always paints the scene of our last happy hours in such undying colours on the memory of the brain. She never, from that day, willingly entered the pretty chamber, with its air of coquetry and stateliness, and its little gay court of porcelain people. She had gathered there the last rose of the year.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

He was so passionately angered against the invader of his domestic peace, he was so profoundly touched by the nobility and faith of his wife, that he went to Olga Brancka's presence without fear or hesitation, possessed only by a man's natural and honest indignation at an insult passed upon what he most venerated upon earth.

One of his own servants, who was seated in the corridor, in readiness for the Countess Brancka's orders, flung wide the door which opened into the vestibule of the suite of guest-chambers allotted to this most hated guest, and said to his master:

'The most noble lady bade me say that she waited for your Excellency.'

'The brazen wretch!' murmured Sabran, as he crossed the antechamber, and entered the small saloon adjoining it; a room hung with Flemish tapestries, and looking out on the Szalrassee.

Olga Brancka was seated in one of the long low tapestried chairs; she did not move or speak as he approached; she only looked up with a smile in her eyes. He wished she would have risen in fury; it would have made his errand easier. It was difficult to say to her in cold blood that which he had to say. But he loathed her so utterly as he saw her indolent and graceful posture, and the calm smile in her eyes, that he was indifferent how he should hurt her, what outrage he should offer to her. He went straight up to where she sat, and without any preface said, almost brutally:

'Madame Brancka, you affected not to understand my message through Greswold; you will not misunderstand me now when I repeat that you must leave the house of my wife before another night.'

'Ah!' said Olga Brancka, with nonchalance, moving the Indian bangles on her wrist, and gazing calmly into the air. 'I am to leave the house of your wife—of my cousin, who was once my sister-in-law? And will you tell me why?'

Sabran flushed with passion.

'You have a short memory, I believe, Countess; at least your lovers have said so in Paris,' he answered recklessly. 'But I think if your remembrance could carry you back to the last evening I had the honour to see you in your hotel, you will not force me to the brutality and coarseness of further explanation.'

'Ah!' she said tranquilly once more, in an unvaried tone, clasping her hands behind her head and leaning both backward against the cushions of her chair, whilst her eyes still smiled with an abstracted gaze. 'How scrupulous you are about trifles! Why

not about great things, my friend? What does Holy Writ tell us? One strains at a gnat and swallows a camel. I have heard a professor of Hebrew say that the Latin translation is not correct, but——'

'Madame,' said Sabran sternly, controlling his rage with difficulty, 'pardon me, but I can have no trifling. I give you time and occasion to make any excuses that you please; but once for all, you will leave here before nightfall.'

'Ah!' said Olga Brancka, for the third time; 'and if I do not choose to comply with your desire, how do you intend to enforce it?'

'That will be my affair.'

'You will make a scene with my husband? That will be theatrical and useless. Stefan is one of those men who are always swearing at their wives in private, but in public never admit that their wives are otherwise than saints. Those men do not mind being cheated, but they will never let others say that they are so: *amour-propre d'homme.*'

Sabran could have struck her. He reined in his wrath with more difficulty every moment.

'I have no doubt your psychology is correct, and has taught you all the weaknesses of our idiotic sex,' he said bitterly. 'But you must pardon me if I cannot spare time to listen to your experiences. The Countess von Szalras is aware that I have come to visit you, and I tell you frankly that I will not stay more than ten minutes in your rooms.'

'You have told her?'

A wicked gleam flashed from under her half-shut eyelids.

'I would have told her—told her all,' said Sabran, 'but she stopped me with my words unspoken. What think you she said, madame, of you, who are the vilest enemy, the only enemy, she has? That if you had graver faults than she knew she wished not to hear them. You were her relative, and once had been her brother's wife.'

His voice had sternness and strong emotion in it. He looked to see her touched to some shame, some humiliation. But she only laughed a little languidly, not changing her attitude.

'Poor Wanda!' she said softly, 'she was always so exaggerated—so terribly *moyen âge* and heroic!'

The veins swelled on his forehead with his endeavour to keep down his rage. He did not wish to honour this woman by bringing his wife's name into their contention, and he strove not to forget the sex of his antagonist.

'Madame Brancka,' he said, with a coldness and calmness which it cost him hard to preserve, 'this conversation is of no use that I can see. I came to tell you a hard fact—simply this, that you must leave Hohenszalras within the next few hours. As the master of this house, I insist on it.'

'But how will you accomplish it?'

'I will compel you to go,' said Sabran, between his teeth, 'if I disgrace you publicly before all my household. The fault will not be mine. I have endeavoured to spare you; but if you be so dead to all feeling and decency as to think it possible that the same roof can shelter you and my wife, I must undeceive you, however roughly.'

She heard him patiently and smiled a little. 'Disgrace *me*?' she echoed gently. 'Count Brancka will kill you.'

Sabran signified by a gesture that the possibility was profoundly indifferent to him. He turned to leave her.

'Understand me plainly,' he said, as he moved away. 'I leave it at your option to invent any summons, any excuse, as your reason for your departure; but if you do not announce your departure for this afternoon, I shall do what I have said. I have the honour to wish you good-morning.'

'Wait a moment,' said Mdme. Brancka, still very softly. 'Are you judicious to make an enemy of me?'

'I much prefer you as an enemy,' said Sabran, curtly; and he added, with contemptuous irony, 'your friendship is far more perilous than your animosity; your compliments are like the Borgia's banquets.'

'Ah!' said Olga Brancka, once again, 'you are ungrateful like all men, and you are not very wise either. You forget that I am the sister-in-law of Egon Vàsàrhely.'

Sabran could never hear that name mentioned without a certain inward tremour, a self-consciousness which he could not entirely conceal. But he was infuriated, and he answered with reckless scorn:

'Prince Vàsàrhely is a man of honour. He would disown you if he knew that you offer yourself with the shamelessness of a *déclassée*, and that you outrage a noble and unsuspecting woman, by forcing yourself into her home when you have failed in tempting her husband to offer her the last dishonour.'

Her face paled under the unveiled and unsparing insults, but she did not lose her equanimity.

'We are very like a scene of Sardou's,' she said, with her unchangeable smile. 'You would have made your fortune on the boards of the Français. Why did you not go there instead of calling yourself Marquis de Sabran? It would have been wiser.'

He felt as if a knife had been plunged through his loins; all the colour left his face. Had Vàsàrhely told *her*? No! it was impossible. They were mere chance words of a woman eager to insult, not knowing what she said. He affected not to hear, and with a bow to her he moved once more to leave the chamber. But her voice again arrested him.

'Tell me one thing before you go,' she said, very gently. 'Does Wanda know that you are Vassia Kazán?'

She spoke with perfect moderation and simplicity, not altering her posture as she lay back in her tapestried chair, but she watched him with trepidation. She was not altogether sure of facts she had half guessed, half gathered. She had pieced details together with infinite skill, but she could not be absolutely certain of her conclusions. She watched him with eager avidity beneath her smiling calmness. If he showed no consciousness her cast was wrong; she would miss her vengeance; she would remain in his power. But at a glance she saw her shaft had pierced straight home. He had strong control and even strong power of dissimulation in need; but that name thrown at him stunned him as a stone might have done. His face grew livid, he stood motionless, he had no falsehood ready, he was taken off his guard: all he realised was that his ruin was in the grasp of his mortal foe. His hold on her was lost. His authority, his strength, his dignity, all fell before those two hateful words, 'Vassia Kazán!'

'He has told her!' he thought, and the blood surged in his brain and made him dazed and giddy. He had not told her. By private investigation, by keen wit, by careful and cruel comparison of various information, she had arrived at the conclusion that Vassia Kazán and he who had come from Mexico as the grandson of the Marquis Xavier de Sabran were one and the same. Certain she could not be, but she was near enough to certainty to dare to cast her stone at a venture. If it missed—she was a woman. He could not kill or harm a woman, or call her to account.

Even now, if he had preserved his composure and turned on her with a calm challenge, she would have been powerless.

But he had lost the habit of falsehood; self-consciousness made him weak; he believed that Egon Vàsàrhely had betrayed him. His lips were mute, his tongue seemed to cleave to his mouth. A less keen-sighted woman would have read confession on his face. She was satisfied.

'You have not answered my question,' she said quietly. 'Does Wanda know it? Does such a saintly woman "compound a felony"? I believe a false name is a sort of felony, is it not?'

He breathed heavily; his eyes had a terrible look in them; he put his hand on his heart. For a moment the longing assailed him to spring upon her and throttle her as a man may a dangerous beast. He could not speak, a leaden weight seemed to shut his lips.

He never doubted that she knew his whole history from Vàsàrhely.

'It was an ingenious device,' she pursued, in her honeyed, even tones, 'but it was scarcely wise. Things are always found out some time or another—at least, men's secrets are. A woman can keep hers. My dear friend, you are really a criminal. It is very strange that Wanda of all people should have made such a misalliance, and had such an imposture passed off on her! I belong to

her family; I ought to abhor you; and yet I can imagine your temptation if I cannot forgive it. Still it was a foolish thing to do, not worthy a man of your wit; and in France, I believe, the punishment for such an assumption is some years' imprisonment; and here, you know (perhaps you do not know?), your marriage would be null and void if she chose.'

He made a movement towards her, and for the moment, though she was a woman of great courage, her spirit quailed before the look she met.

'Hold your peace!' he said savagely. 'Speak truth if you can. What has Vàsàrhely told you?'

Vàsàrhely had told her nothing, but she looked him full in the face with perfect serenity, and answered—'All!'

He never doubted her, he could not doubt her; what she said was met by too full confirmation from his memory and his conscience.

'He gave me his word,' he muttered.

She smiled. 'His word to *you*, when he is in love with your wife? The miracle is that he has not told her. She would divorce you, and after a decent interval I dare say she would marry him, if only *pour balayer la chose*. For a man so devoted to her as you are, you have certainly contrived to outrage and injure her in the most complete manner. *Mon beau Marquis!* to think how fooled we all were all the time by you. How haughty you were, how fastidious, how patrician!'

He leaned against the high column of the enamelled stove and covered his eyes with his hands. He was unnerved, unstrung, half paralysed. The blow had fallen on him without preparation or defence being possible to him. His thoughts were all in confusion; one thing alone he knew—he, and all he loved, were in the power of a merciless woman, who would no more spare them than the *sloughi* astride the antelope will let go its quivering flesh.

She looked at him, and a contemptuous wonder came upon her that a man could be so easily beaten, so easily betrayed into tacit confession. She ignored the power of conscience, for she did not know it herself.

She thought, with scorn: 'Why did he not deny, deny boldly, as I should have done in his place? He would have twisted my weapon out of my hand at once. I know so little, and I could prove nothing! But he is unnerved at once, just because it is true! Men are all imbeciles. If he had only denied and questioned me he must have found that Egon had told me nothing.'

And she watched him with derision.

In truth, she knew so little; she had scarce more to guide her than coincidence and conjecture. She longed to know everything from himself, but, strong as was her curiosity, her prudence and her cruelty were stronger still, and she admirably assumed a

knowledge that she had not, guided in all her dagger-strokes by the suffering she caused.

Yet her passion for him which, unslaked, was as ardent as ever, became not the less, but the greater, because she had him in her power. She was one of those women to whom love is only delightful if it possess the means to torture. Besides, it was not himself whom she hated, it was his wife. To make him faithless to his wife would be a more exquisite triumph than to betray him to her.

'He would be wax in my hands,' she thought. A vision of the future passed before her, with her dominion absolute over him, her knowledge of his shame holding him down with a chain never to be broken. She would compel him to wound, to deceive, to torment his wife; she would dictate his every word, his every act; she would make him ridiculous to the world, so servile should be his obedience to her, so great should be his terror of her anger. He should be her lover, weak as water in all semblance, because the puppet of her pleasure. This would be a vengeance worthy of herself when she should see him kneel at her feet for permission for every slightest act, and she should scourge him as with whips, knowing he dare not rise; when she should say softly in his ear a thousand times a year: 'You are Vassia Kazán!'

She was silent a few moments, lost in the witchery of the vision she conjured up; then she looked up at him and said very caressingly, in her sweetest voice:

'Why are you so dejected? Your secret may be safe with me. You know—you know—I was willing ever to be your friend; I am not less willing now. I told you that you were unwise to make an enemy of me. Wanda's regard would not outlive such a trial, but perhaps mine may, if you be discerning enough, grateful enough to trust to it. I know your crime, for a crime it is, and a foul one: we must not attempt to palliate it. When we last met you offended, you outraged me. Only a few moments since you insulted me as though I were the lowest creature on the Paris asphalte. Yet all this I—I—should be tempted to forgive if you love me as I believe that you do. I love *you*. not as that cold, calm, unerring woman yonder may, but as those only can who know and care for no heaven but earth. Réné—Vassia—who, knowing your sin, your shame, your birth, your treachery, would say to you what I say? Not Wanda!'

He seemed not to hear, he did not hear. He leaned his forehead upon his arms; he was sunk in the apathy of an intense woe; only the name of his wife reached him, and he shivered a little as with cold.

At his silence, his indifference, her eyes grew alight with flame; but she controlled herself; she rose and clasped her hands upon his arm,

'Listen,' she murmured, 'I love you, I love you! I care nothing what you were born, what sins you have sinned; I love you! Love me, and she shall never know. I will silence Egon. I will bury your secret as though it were one that would cost me my life were it known.'

Only at the touch of her hands did he arouse himself to any consciousness of what she was saying, of how she tempted him. Then he shook off her clasp with a rude gesture; he looked down on her with the bitterest of scorn: not for a single instant did he dream of purchasing her silence so.

'You are even viler than I thought,' he said in his throat, with a dreary laugh of mockery. 'How long would you spare me if I sinned against her with you? Go, do your worst, say your worst! But if you stay beneath my wife's roof to-night, I will drive you out of the house before all her people, if it be my last act of authority in Hohenszalras!'

'I love you!' she murmured, and almost knelt to him; but he thrust her away from him, and stood erect, his arms folded on his chest.

'How dare you speak of love to me? You force me to employ the language of the gutter. If Egon Vàsàrhely have put me in your power, use it, like the incarnate fiend you are. I ask no mercy of you, but if you dare to speak of love to me I will strangle you where you stand. Since you call me the wolf of the steppes, you shall feel my grip.'

She fell a few steps backward and stretched her hand behind her, and rang a little silver bell. Absorbed in his own bitterness of thought he did not hear the sound or see the movement. She had already, between Greswold's visit to her and his master's, written a little letter:

'Loved Wanda,—Will you be so good as to come to me for a moment at once?—Yours, 'OLGA.'

She had said to one of her women, who was in the next apartment: 'When I ring you will take that note at once to my cousin, the Countess, yourself, without coming to me.' She had had no fear of leaving the woman in the adjoining room, who was a Russian, wholly ignorant of the French tongue, which she herself always used.

She recoiled from him, frightened for the moment, but only for that; she had nerves of steel, and many men had cursed her and menaced her for the ruin of their lives, and she had lived on none the worse. '*On crie—et puis c'est fini*,' she was wont to say, with her airy cynicism. Something in his look, in his voice, told her that here it would not finish thus.

'He will shoot himself if he do not strangle me, and he will escape so,' she thought, and a faint sort of fear touched her. She

was alone before him; she had said enough to drive him out of all calmness and all reason. She had left him nothing to hope for; she had made him believe that she knew all his fatal past. If he had struck her down into the dumbness of death he would have been scarcely guilty.

But it was only for a moment that such a dread as this passed over her.

'Pshaw! we are people of the world,' she thought. 'Society is with us even in our solitude. Those violent crimes are not ours: we strike otherwise than with our hands.'

And, reassured, she sank down into her chair again, a delicate figure in a cloud of muslin of the Deccan and old lace of Flanders, and clasped her fingers gracefully behind her head, and waited.

He did not move; his eyes were fastened on her, glittering and cold as ice, and full of unspeakable hatred. He was deadly pale. She thought she had never seen his face more beautiful than in that intense mute wrath which was like the iron frost of his own land.

'When he goes he will go and kill himself,' she mused, and she listened with passionate eagerness for the passing of steps down the corridor.

But he did not stir; he was absorbed in wondering how he could deal with this woman so that his wife should be spared. Was there any way save that vile way to which she had tempted him? He could see none. From a passion rejected and despised there can be no chance of mercy. He had ceased altogether to think of himself.

To take his own life did not pass over his thoughts then. It would have spared Wanda nothing. His shame, told when he were dead, would hurt her almost more than when he were living. He had too much courage to evade so the consequences of his own acts. In the confusion of his mind only this one thing was present to it—the memory of his wife. All that he had dreaded of disgrace, of divorce, of banishment, of ruin, were nothing to him; what he thought of was the loss of her herself, her adoration, her honour, her sweet obedience, her perfect faith. Would ever he touch even her hand again if once she knew?

His remorse and his grief for his wife overwhelmed and destroyed every personal remembrance. If to spare her he could have undergone any extremity of torture he would have welcomed it with rapture. But it is not thus that a false step can be retrieved; not thus that a false word can be effaced. It, and the fate it brings, must be faced to the bitter end.

He had no illusions; he was certain that the woman who would have tempted him to be false to her would spare her nothing. He would not even stoop to solicit a respite for her from Olga Brancka. He knew the only price at which it could be obtained.

He stood there, leaning his shoulders on the high cornice of the stove, his arms crossed upon his chest, repressing every expression or gesture that could have delighted his enemy by revelation of what he suffered. In himself he felt paralysed; he felt as though neither his brain nor his limbs would ever serve him again. He had the sensation of having fallen from a great height; the same numbness and exhaustion which he had felt when he had dropped down the frozen side of the Umbal glacier. Both he and she were silent: he from the stupefaction of horror, she from the eagerness with which she was listening for the coming of Wanda von Szalras.

After a short interval of her thirsty and cruel anxiety, the page, who was in waiting outside, entered with a note for his master.

Sabran strove to recover his composure as he stretched his hand out and took the letter off the salver. It contained only two lines from his wife:

'Olga asks me to come to her. Do you wish me to do so?'

A convulsion passed over his face.

'Oh! most faithful of all friends!' he thought with a pang, touched to the quick by those simple words of a woman whose fidelity was to be repaid by shame.

'Where is the Countess?' he asked of the young servant, who answered that she was in the library.

'Say that I will be with her there in a few moments.'

The page withdrew.

Olga Brancka was mute; there was a great anger in her veiled eyes. Her last stroke had missed, through the loyalty of the woman whom she hated.

He took a step towards her.

'You dared to send for her, then?'

She laughed aloud, and with insolence.

'Dare? Is that a word to be used by a Russian *moujik*, as you are, to me, the daughter of Fedor Demetrivitch Serriatine? Certainly, I sent for your wife, my cousin. Who should know what I know, if not she? Egon might make you what promises he would; he is a man and a fool. I make none. If you prevent my seeing Wanda, I shall write to her; if you stop her letters, I shall telegraph to her; if you stop the telegrams, I will put your story in the Paris journals, where the Marquis de Sabran is as well known as the Arc de l'Etoile. You were born a serf, you shall feel the knout. It would have been well for you if you had smarted under it in your youth.'

So absorbed was he in the memory of his wife, and in the thought of the misery about to fall upon her innocent life, that the insults to himself struck on him harmless, as hail on iron.

'Spare your threats,' he said coldly. 'No one shall tell her

but myself. You know her present condition; it will most likely kill her.'

'Oh no,' said the Countess Brancka, with a little smile. 'Her nerves are of iron. She will divorce you, that is all.'

'She will be in her right,' he said, with the same coldness. Then, without another word, he turned and left her chamber.

'For a bastard, he crows well!' she said, loud enough to be heard by him, in the old twelfth-century French of the words she quoted.

Sabran went onward with a quick step; if he had paused, if he had looked back, he felt that he would have murdered her.

'Talk of the cruelty of men! What beast that lives,' he thought, 'has the slow, unsparing brutality of a jealous woman?'

He went on, without pausing once, across the great house. So much he could spare his wife, he could save her from her enemy's triumph in her suffering; he could do as men did in the Indian Mutiny, plunge the knife himself into the heart that loved him, and spare her further outrage.

When he reached the door of the library, he stopped and drew a deep breath. He would have gone to his death with calmness and a smile; but here he had no courage. A sickening spasm of pain seemed to suffocate him. He knew that he met only his just punishment. If he could only have suffered alone he would not have rebelled against his doom! But to smite her——

With greater courage than is needed in the battle-field he turned the handle of the door and entered. She was seated at one of the writing-tables with a mass of correspondence before her, to which she had been vainly striving to give her attention. Her thoughts had been with him and Olga Brancka. She looked up with the light on her face which always came there when she saw him after any absence, long or short. But that light was clouded as she perceived the change in his look, in his carriage, in his very features, which were aged, and drawn, and bloodless. She rose with an exclamation of alarm, as he came to her across the length of the noble room, where he had first seen her seated by her own hearth, and heard her welcome him a stranger and unknown beneath her roof.

'Wanda! Wanda!' he said, and his voice seemed strangled, his lips seemed dumb.

'My God, what is it?' she cried faintly. 'Are the children——'

'No, no,' he muttered. 'The children are well. It is worse than death. Wanda, I have come to tell you the sin of my life, the shame of it. Oh! how will you ever believe that I loved you since I wronged you so?'

A great sob broke down his words.

She put her hand to her heart.

'Tell me,' she said, in a low whisper, 'tell me everything. Why not have trusted me? Tell me—I am strong.'

Then he told her the whole history of his past, and spared nothing.

She listened in unbroken silence, standing all the while, leaning one hand upon the ebony table by her.

When he had ceased to speak he buried his face in her skirts where he knelt at her feet; he did not dare to look at her. She was still silent; her breath came and went with shuddering effort. She drew her velvet gown from him with a gesture of unspeakable horror.

'You!—you!' she said, and could find no other word.

Then all grew dark around her; she threw her arms out in the void, and fell from her full height as a stone drops from a rock into the gulf below; struck dumb and senseless for the first time in all the years that she had lived.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Twelve hours later she gave premature birth to a male child, dead. Once in those hours when her physical agony lulled for a moment and her consciousness returned, she said to her physician:

'Tell him to send for Egon. Egon betrays no one.'

They were the first words she had spoken. Greswold understood nothing; but he saw that some great calamity had fallen on those he loved and honoured, and that her lord never came nigh her chamber, but only pacing to and fro the corridors and passages of the house, with restless, ceaseless steps, paused ever and again to whisper—'Does she live?'

'Come to her,' said the old man once; but Sabran shuddered and turned aside.

'I dare not,' he answered, 'I dare not. If she die, it is I who shall have killed her.'

Greswold did not venture to ask what had happened; he knew it must be some disaster of which the Countess Brancka was the origin or the messenger.

'My lady has spoken a few words,' he said later to his master. 'She bade me tell you send for Prince Vàsàrhely. She said he would betray no one. I could ask nothing, for her agony returned.'

Sabran was silent; the thought came to him for the first time that it might be possible Olga Brancka had used the name of her brother-in-law falsely.

'Send for him yourself,' he said wearily. 'What she wishes must be done. Nothing matters to me.'

'I think the Prince is in Vienna,' said Greswold; and he sent

an urgent message thither, entreating Vàsàrhely's immediate presence at Hohenszalras, in the name of his cousin.

Olga Brancka remained in her own apartments, uncertain what to do.

'If Wanda die,' she thought, 'it will all have been of no use; he will be neither divorced nor disgraced. Perhaps one might plead the marriage invalid, and disinherit the children; but one would want so much proof, and I have none. If he had not been so stunned and taken off his guard, he might easily have defied me. Egon may know more, but if Wanda dies he will not move. He would care for nothing on earth. He will forget the children were Sabran's. He will only remember they were hers!'

No one who loved her could have been more anxious for Wanda von Szalras to live than was this cruellest of her enemies, who passed the time in a perpetual agitation, and as her women brought her tidings from hour to hour, testified so much genuine alternation of hope and terror, that they were amazed to see so much feeling in one so indifferent usually to all woes not her own. She was miserably dull; she had no one to speak to; she had no lover, friend, rival, or foe to give her the stimulant to life that was indispensable to her. Even she did not dare to approach the man whose happiness she had ruined, any more than she would have dared to touch a lion wounded to the death. Yet she could not tear herself away from the scene of her vengance.

The whole house was hushed like a grave; the servants were full of grief at the danger of a mistress they adored; even the young children, understanding that their mother was in peril, did not play or laugh, but sat unhappy and silent over their books, or wandered aimlessly along the leafless gardens. They knew that there was something terrible, though they knew not what.

'What is death?' said Lili to her brothers.

'It is to go and live with God, they *say*,' answered Bela, doubtfully.

'But how can God be happy Himself,' said Gela, 'when he causes so much sorrow?'

'Our mother will never go away from us,' said the little Lili, who listened. 'They may call her from heaven ever—ever so much; she will not leave *us*.'

Bela sighed; he had a heavy, hopeless impression of death as a thing that was stronger than himself.

'Pride can do naught against death, my little lord,' one of the foresters had once said to him. 'You will find your master there one day.'

A day and a night passed; puerperal convulsions succeeded to the birth of the dead boy, and Wanda was unconscious alike of her bodily and her mental torture. The physicians, whom Greswold had summoned instantly, were around her bed, grave and anxious. The only chance for her lay in the magnificent health and strength

with which nature had dowered her. Her constitution might, they said, enable her to resist what weaklier women would have gone down under like boats in an ocean storm.

It was towards dawn on the second day when Egon Vàsàrhely arrived.

'She lives?' he said, as he entered.

'That is all,' said Greswold, with tears in his voice.

'Can I see her?'

'It would be useless. She would not know your Excellency.'

Sabran came forward from the further end of the Rittersaal, where the lights were burning with a yellow glare as the grey light of the dawn was stealing through the unshuttered windows.

'Allow me the honour of a word with you, Prince,' he said. 'I understand; you have come at her summons—not at mine.'

Greswold withdrew and left them alone. Vàsàrhely was still wrapped in the furs in which he had travelled. He stood erect and listened; his face was very stern.

'Did you give up my secret to your brother's wife?' said Sabran, abruptly.

'Can you ask that?' said Vàsàrhely. 'You had my word.'

'Mdme. Brancka knows all that you know. She said that you had betrayed me to her. She would have told Wanda. I chose sooner to tell her myself. The shock has killed the child. It may kill her. Your sister-in-law is here. If she used your name falsely it is for you to avenge it.'

'Tell me what passed between you,' said Prince Egon. His face was dark as night.

Sabran hesitated a moment. Even now he could not bring himself to diclose the passion which his enemy had conceived for him. It was one of those women's secrets which no gentleman can surrender to another.

'You are aware,' he replied, 'that Mdme. Brancka has been always envious of your cousin; always willing to hurt her. When she got possession of the story of my past she used it without mercy. She would have told my wife with brutality; I told her myself, hoping to spare her something by my own confession. Mdme. Brancka affirmed to me, twice or thrice over, that you had given her all the information against me.'

'How could you believe her? You had had my promise.'

'How could I doubt her?'

'It is natural you should know nothing of honour!' thought Vàsàrhely, but he did not utter what he thought. He saw that, dark as had been the crimes of Sabran against those of his race, the chastisement of them was as great.

He said simply:

'You might sooner have doubted anything than have believed that I should entrust the Countess Brancka with such a secret,

and have given her such a power to injure my cousin. How can she have learned your history? Have you betrayed yourself?'

'Never! Since she had it not from you, I cannot conceive how or where she learned it. Not a soul lives that knows me as——'

He paused; he could not bring himself to say the name he bore from birth.

'My brother is unfortunate,' said Vàsàrhely, curtly. 'He has wedded a vile woman. Leave her to me.'

He saluted Sabran with cold but careful ceremony, and went to his own apartments. Sabran passed to the corridor which led to his wife's rooms, and there resumed his miserable restless walk to and fro before her door. He dared not enter. In her conscious hours she had not asked for him. He had ever present before his eyes that movement of horror, of repulsion, with which she had drawn the hem of her gown from his grasp.

Now and again, when her attendants came in and out, he saw through the opening of the door the bed on which she lay and the outline of her form in the pale light of the lamp. He could not rest. He could not even sit down or break a mouthful of bread. If she died, his sin against her would have slain her as surely as though his hand had taken her life. It was about six of the clock in the chilly dawn of the autumnal day.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Egon Vàsàrhely passed the next three hours in mental conflict with his own passions. It would have been precious to him—would have been a blessed and sacred duty—to avenge the woman he adored. But he had a harder task. For her sake he had to befriend the traitor who had wronged her, and shelter him from the just opprobrium of the world. Crueller combat with temptation none ever waged than he fought now against his own truest instincts, his own dearest affections. She lay there, perchance dying, of this treachery which had struck her down in her happiest hours; and it seemed to him as if, through the silence of the darkened and melancholy house, he heard her voice saying to him: 'For my sake, spare him—spare my children!'

'I give you more than my life, my beloved!' he murmured, as he sat alone, whilst the grey day widened over forest and mountain, and for her sake prepared to shield the man who had deceived her from disgrace and death.

'The hound!' he thought. 'He should be branded as a perjurer and thief throughout the world! Yet for her—for her—one must protect him.'

An hour or two later he sent his name to the Countess Brancka, with a request to be received by her. She was but then awaking, and heard with astonishment and alarm of his arrival, so unlooked for and so dreaded. It had never occurred to her as possible that he would come to Hohenszalras.

'Wanda must have sent for him!' she thought. 'Oh, heavens! why could she not die with the child!'

It was impossible for her to avoid him; shut up here she could neither deceive nor escape him. She could not go away without her departure being known to the whole household. She was afraid of him, terribly afraid; the Vàsàrhely had a hand of iron when they were offended or injured. But she put a fair face on a bitter obligation, and, when she was dressed, went with a pretty smile into the salon to receive him.

Vàsàrhely gave her no greeting as he entered. A great fear took possession of her as she saw the expression of his eyes. He was the only living being of whom she was in awe. He approached her without any observances of courtesy. He said, simply and sternly:

'I hear that you have used my name falsely to the husband of Wanda; that you have dared to give me as your authority for accusations against him. What is your excuse?'

She was for the moment so bewildered and disturbed by his presence and his charge that she lost all her ability and power of interminable falsehood. She was silent, and he saw her bosom heave and her hands tremble a little.

'What is your excuse?' he said again. 'Why did you come into this house to injure Wanda von Szalras? How did you dare to use my name to do her that injury?'

She tried to laugh a little, but she was nervous and thrown off her guard.

'I wished to do her a service! Since she has married an adventurer—an impostor—she ought to know it and be free.'

'What is your authority for calling the Marquis de Sabran an adventurer? To him you employed my name as your authority. What truth was beneath that lie?'

She was silent. For the only time in her life she knew not what to say. She had no facts in her hands. Her ground was too uncertain to sustain her in a steady attitude.

'You know that he is Vassia Kazán!' she said, with another little laugh.

The face of Vàsàrhely revealed nothing.

'Who is Vassia Kazán?' he repeated.

'He is—the man who robbed you of Wanda.'

'He could not rob me of what I never possessd. What grounds have you for calling him by this name?'

'I have reason to believe it.'

'Reason to believe it! You told him that you heard this story from myself.'

'He never denied it.'

'I am not concerned to discuss what he did or did not do. I come here to know on what grounds you employed my name?'

'Egon, I will tell you the truth!'

'Can you?'

'Yes; I can and I will. When I was at Taróc, three summers ago, I saw a fragment of a letter in Sabran's writing. I saw the name of Vassia Kazán. I put this and that together. I heard something from Russia; I sent some people to Mexico. I had always had my suspicions. I do not say I have any positive legal proof, but I am morally convinced that he is no Marquis de Sabran, and that he was born a serf near the city of Kazán. I have charged him with it, and he has as good as confessed it. He was struck dumb with consciousness.'

She watched the face of Vàsàrhely, but it might have been cast in bronze for anything that it told her.

'You saw a fragment of a letter, of which you knew nothing,' he said coldly; 'you formed some vague suspicions; you descended to the use of spies, and, because you have invented a theory of your own on your so-called discoveries, you deem you have a title to ruin the happiness of your cousin's home. And you father your work upon me! Often have I pitied my brother, but never so deeply as now.'

'If my so-called discoveries were false,' she interrupted with hardihood, 'why did he not say so? He was convicted by his own admissions. If my charge had been baseless, would he have said that he would tell his wife himself rather than let her learn it from me?'

'I neither know nor care what he said,' answered Vàsàrhely. 'I have only your version for it. You must pardon me if I do not attach implicit credence to your word. What I do know is that you ventured to use my name to give force and credibility to your accusations. Had you really known for certainty such a history, you would, had you had any decency or feeling, have consulted your husband and myself on the best means of shielding our cousin's honour. But you have always envied and hated her. What is her husband to you—what is it to you whether he be a noble or a clown? You snatch at the first brand you think you see, in the hope to scorch her honour with it. But when you used my name falsely you did a dangerous thing for yourself. I shall waste no more words upon you, but you will sign what I write now, or you will repent it.'

She affected to laugh.

'My dear Egon, *quel ton de maître!* What authority have you over me? Even if you invest yourself in your brother's, that counts for very little, I assure you.'

'Perhaps so; but if my brother be too careless of his honour and too credulous of your deceptions, he is yet man enough to resent such infamy as you have been guilty of now. You will sign this.'

He passed to her a few lines which he had already written and brought with him. They ran thus:

'I, Olga, Countess Brancka, do acknowledge that I most untruthfully used the name of my husband's brother, the Prince Vàsàrhely, in an endeavour to injure the gentleman known as the Marquis de Sabran; and I hereby do ask the pardon of them both, and confess that in such pardon I receive great leniency and forbearance.'

'Sign it,' said Prince Egon.

'Pshaw!' said Mdme. Brancka, and pushed it away with a loud laugh, deigning no further answer.

'Will you sign it or not?' asked Vàsàrhely.

She replied by tearing it in shreds.

'It is easily rewritten,' he said, unmoved. He went to a writing table that stood in the room, looked for paper and found it, and wrote out the same formula.

'Do not be foolish, Olga,' he said curtly, as he returned. 'You are a clever woman, and always consult your own interests. I dare say you have done a thousand things as base as your attempt to ruin my cousin's happiness, but I do not suppose you have often done anything so unwise. You will sign this at once, or you will regret it very greatly.'

'Why should I sign it?' she said insolently. 'The man is what I say; he could not deny it. If I only guessed at the truth, I guessed aright. I wonder that you do not see *your* interests lie in exposing him. When the world knows he is an impostor Wanda will divorce him and put the children under other names in religious houses. Then you will be able to marry her. I told him she would marry you *pour balayer la honte*.'

For the moment she was alarmed at the fires that leapt from Vàsàrhely's sombre eyes. It cost him much—as much as it had cost Sabran—not to strike her where she stood. He paused a second to control himself, then answered her coldly and calmly—

'My cousin will never seek a divorce, nor shall I wed with a divorced woman. Your hate misleads you; there is no blinder thing than hate. You will sign this paper, or I shall telegraph for my brother.'

'For Stefan!'

All her boundless indifference to her husband, and her contempt for him, were spoken in the accent she gave his name.

'For Stefan. You are pleased to despise him because you can lead him into mad follies, and can make him believe you are an innocent woman. But Stefan is not altogether the ignoble dupe you think him. He is a dupe—wiser men than he have been so;

but he would not bear your infidelity to him if he really knew it, nor would he bear other things if he knew of them. Two years ago you took two hundred thousand florins' worth of diamonds, in my name, from my jeweller Landsee in the Graben. How should a tradesman suspect that a Countess Brancka was dishonest? At the end of the year he brought his bill for that and other things to me, whilst I was in Vienna. He had never, of course, doubted that you went on my authority. Equally, of course, I did not betray you, but paid the amount. When you do such things you should not give written orders. They remain against you. Now, if Stefan knew this, or if he knew that you had taken money from the richest of your lovers, the young Duc de Blois, as I knew it so long as seven years ago, you would no longer find him the malleable easily cozened fool you deem him. You would learn that he has Vàsàrhely blood in him. I have only named two out of the many questionable facts I know against you. They have been safe with me. I would never urge Stefan to a public scandal. But, unless you sign this, and apologise for using my name to the husband of my cousin, as you used it to Landsee of the Graben, I shall tell my brother. He will not divorce you. That is not our way; we do not go to lawyers to redress our wrongs. But he will compel you to retire for your life into a religious house—as you would compel the harmless children of Wanda; or he would imprison you himself in one of our lonely places in the mountains, where you would cry in vain for your lovers, and your friends, and your *menus plaisirs*, and none would hear you. Do not mistake me. You have often called us barbaric; you will find we can be so. As I say, we do not carry our wrongs to lawyers. We can avenge ourselves.'

She had lost all colour as he spoke. A nervous spasm of laughter contracted her mouth, and remained on it like the ghastly *rictus* of death. She knew him well enough to know that he meant every syllable he said. The Vàsàrhely had stern tragedies in their annals, and to women impure and unfaithful had been merciless as Othello.

She felt that she was vanquished; that she would have to obey him or suffer worse things. But though she was aware of her own impotence, she could not resist a retort that should sting him.

'You are very chivalrous! I always knew you had an insane adoration of your cousin, but I never should have thought you would have put on sabre and spurs in her husband's defence. Will he reward you by effacing himself? Will he end as he has begun, like the hero of a melodrama at the Gymnase, and shoot himself at Wanda's feet? You would marry a widow, though you would not marry a divorced woman!'

'Some time ago, when we spoke of him,' he replied, still with stern self-control, 'I told you that were his honour called in ques-

tion I would defend it as I would my brother's—not for his sake, for hers. I would, for her sake, defend it so were he the guiltiest soul on earth. He belongs to her. He is sacred to her. You mistake if you deem her such a woman as yourself. She has loved him. She will love no other whilst she lives. She has given herself to him. She will give herself to no other, though she outlive him from this hour. You make your calculations unwisely, for when you make them you suppose that every man and every woman have your own dishonesty, your own passions, your own baseness. You are short of sight, because you only see in the circle of your own conceptions.'

She understood that he knew the secret of the man he protected, but that he would never admit that he did so; would never reveal it or let any other reveal it. She understood that he had himself forborne from its exposure, and would never, whilst he lived, allow any other to hold it up to the derision of the world. She understood that, if need were, Vàsàrhely would defend, as he said, the honour of his cousin's husband at the point of the sword against all foes or mockers.

'For her sake!' she cried, 'always for her sake! What can you both see so marvellous in her? She has been a greater fool than any woman that has ever lived, though she can read Greek and write in Latin! What has she done with all her wisdom and her holiness? You know as well as though it were written there upon the wall that he is what I say. Why do you put your lance in rest for him? Why are you ready to shed blood on his behalf? He is an impostor who has taken in first the world and then the mistress of Hohenszalras. If you were the hero you have always seemed to me you would tear his heart out of his breast, shoot him like a wolf in these very woods! If her honour is yours, avenge her dishonour!'

She spoke with force and fire, and longing to behold the spirit of evil roused in her hearer's soul and stung to action.

But she might as well have tried to move the mountains from their base as rouse either pain or rage in her brother-in-law. Vàsàrhely kept his attitude of stern, cold, contemptuous disgust. Not a muscle of his face changed. He said merely:

'You have been told what I shall do if you do not sign this paper. The choice is yours. If you desire to hear any more episodes of your past I can tell you many.'

Then she changed her attitude and her eloquence. She dissolved in tears; she wept; she implored; she tried to kneel to him. But he was inflexible.

'You are a good actress,' he said simply. 'But you forget; it is Stefan whom you can deceive, not me.'

When she had vainly used all her resources of alternate entreaty and invective, of cajolery and insolence, she sank into her chair, exhausted, hysterical, nerveless.

'I am ill; call my woman,' she said faintly.

He replied:

'You are no more ill than I am.'

'You are brutal, Egon,' she said, raising herself, with flashing eyes and hissing tongue.

'What have you been to her?' said Vàsàrhely.

He waited with cold, inflexible patience. When another half-hour had gone by she signed the paper, and flung it with fury to him.

'You know very well it is true!' she cried, as she leaned across the table like a slender snake that darted. 'Would she lie dying of it if it were only a lie?'

'That I know not,' said Vàsàrhely, coldly. 'What I know is that your carriage will be ready in an hour, and that you will go hence. If ever you be tempted to speak of what has occurred here, you will remember that my silence to Stefan and your own people is only conditional on yours on another matter.'

Then he left her.

She was cowed, intimidated, vanquished. When the hour was over she went through the two lines of bowing servants, and left Hohenszalras ere the noon was past.

'It is the first time in my life I ever failed,' she thought, as the pinnacles and towers of the burg were lost to her sight. 'What do these men see in that woman?'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VÀSÀRHELY, when he left her, went straight to Sabran, who, seated on an oaken bench in the corridor of his wife's apartments, knew not how the hours passed, and seemed aged ten years in a day. Vàsàrhely motioned him to pass into one of the empty chambers. There he gave him the lines which Olga Brancka had signed.

'You are safe from her,' he said. 'She cannot tell your story to the world. She will not dare even to whisper it as a conjecture.'

Sabran did not speak. This great debt owed to his greatest foe hurt him even whilst it delivered him.

'For the first time I have concealed the truth,' pursued Vàsàrhely. 'I affected to disbelieve her story. There was no other way to save it from publicity. That alone would not have sufficed, but I had means to coerce her.'

'You have been very generous.'

Vàsàrhely shrank from his praise as though from some insolence. He did not look at Sabran; he spoke briefly between his closed

teeth. All his soul was full of longing to strike this man; to meet him in open combat and to kill him; forcing him and his foul secret together down underneath the sole sure cover of the grave. But the sense that so near, within a few feet of them, she lay in peril of her life, made even vengeance seem for the moment profane and blasphemous.

'There will be always time,' he thought.

That hushed and darkened chamber hard by awed his hatred into silence. What would she wish? What would she command? Could he but know that, how clear would be his path!

He hesitated a moment, then turned away.

'I shall wait here until the danger is past, or she is called to God,' he said hoarsely.

Then he walked away down the corridor slowly, like a man wounded with a wound that bleeds within.

Sabran stood awhile where he had left him, his eyes bent on the ground, his heart sick with shame.

'*He* was worthy of her!' he thought with the most bitter pang of his life.

Three more days and nights passed; they were to him like a hideous night-mare; at times he thought with horror that he would lose his reason. The dreadful stillness, the dreadful silence, the knowledge that death was so near that bed which he dared not approach, the impossibility of learning what memories of him, what hatred of him, might not be haunting the stupor in which she lay, together made up a torture to which her bitterest reproach, her deadliest punishment would have seemed merciful.

All through that exhaustion, in which they believed her mind was without consciousness, the memory of all that he had told her was alive in it, in that poignant remembrance which the confusion of a dulled brain only makes but the more terrible, turning and changing what it suffers from into a thousand shapes. In her worst agony this consciousnesss never left her; she kept silence because in her uttermost weakness she was strong enough not to give her woe to the ears of the others, but in her heart there seemed a great knife plunged, a knife rusted with blood that was dishonoured.

When she knew that the child she bore was dead, she felt no sorrow, she thought only—'Begotten of a serf, of a coward!'

The intolerable outrage, the intolerable deception, were like flames of fire that seemed to eat up her life; her love for him, for the hour at least, had been stunned and ceased to speak. To the woman who came of the races of Szalras and Vàsàrhely, the dishonour covered every other memory.

'All his life only one long lie!' she thought.

Her race had been stainless through a thousand years of chivalry and heroism, and she—its sole descendant—had sullied it with the blood of a base-born impostor!

Whilst she lay sunk in what they deemed a perfect apathy, the disgrace done to her, to her name, to her ancestry, was ever present to her mind: a spectre which no one saw save herself. Every other emotion was for the time quenched in that. She felt as though the whole world had struck her on the cheek and she was powerless to resent or to revenge the blow. In hours of delirium she thought she saw all the men and women of her race who had reigned there before her standing about her bed, and saying: 'You held our honour, and what did you do with it? You let it sink to the earth in the arms of a nameless coward.'

One night she said suddenly: 'My cousin—is he here?'

When they told her that he had remained at Hohenszalras she seemed reassured. At sunrise she asked the same question. When they answered with the same affirmative, she said: 'Bid him come to me.'

They fetched him instantly. As he passed Sabran in the corridor he paused.

'Your wife has sent for me,' he said; 'have I your permission to see her?'

Sabran bent his head, but his heart beat thickly with the only jealousy he had ever felt. She asked for Egon Vàsàrhely in her stupor of misery, and he, her husband, had lost the right to enter her chamber, dared not approach her presence!

'Wanda, I am here!' said Vàsàrhely, softly, as he bent over her. She looked at him with eyes full of unspeakable agony.

'Is it true?' she murmured.

'Yes!' he said bitterly between his teeth.

'And you knew it?'

'Too late! But Wanda—my beloved Wanda—trust to me. The world shall never hear it.'

Her eyes had closed, a shiver ran through all her frame. 'Olga?' she muttered.

'She is in my power. I will deal with her,' he answered. 'She will be silent as the grave.'

She gave a long shuddering sigh, and her head sank back upon her pillows.

Vàsàrhely fell on his knees beside her bed, and buried his face on her hands.

'My violated saint!' he murmured. 'Fear not; I will avenge you.'

Low though the words were, they reached and moved her in her dim blind weakness. She stretched out her hand, and touched his bowed head.

'No, no—not *that*. He is my children's father. He must be sacred; give me your word, Egon, there shall be no bloodshed between him and you.'

'I am your next friend,' he said, with intense appeal in his voice. 'You are insulted and dishonoured—your race is affronted

and stained—who should avenge that if not I, your kinsman? There is no male of your house. It falls to me.'

All the manhood and knighthood in him were athirst for the life of the impostor who had dishonoured what he adored.

'Promise me,' she said again.

'Your brothers are dead,' he muttered. 'I may well stand in their place. Their swords would have found him out ere he were an hour older.'

She raised herself with a supreme effort, and through the pallor and misery of her face there came a momentary flash of anger, a momentary flash of the old spirit of command.

'My brothers are dead, and I forbid any other to meddle with my life. If any one slew him it would be I—I—in my own right.'

Her voice had been for the instant stern and sustained, but physical faintness overcame her; her lips grew grey, and the darkness of great weakness came before her sight.

'I forbid you! I forbid you!' she said, as her breath failed her.

Vàsàrhely remained kneeling beside her bed. His shoulders trembled with restrained emotion. Even now she shut him out of her life. She denied him the right to be her champion and avenger.

She moved her hand towards him as a blind woman would have done.

'Give me your word.'

'You are my law,' he answered. 'I will do nothing that you forbid.'

She inclined her head with a feeble gesture of recognition of the words. He rose slowly, kissed the white fingers that lay near him, and, without speaking, left her presence.

'Bloodshed, bloodshed!' she thought, in the vague feverish confusion of half-conscious thought. 'Though rivers of blood rolled between him and me what could they wash away of the shame that is with me for ever? What could death do? Death could blot out nothing.'

A sense of awful impotence lay upon her like a weight of iron. Do what she would she could never change the past! Her sons must grow to youth and manhood tainted and dishonoured in her sight. There were times when all the martial and arrogant spirit in her was like flame in her veins, and she thought: 'Could I but rise and kill him—I, myself!'

It seemed to her that it would be but justice.

When Vàsàrhely, coming out from her chamber, passed the impostor who had done her this dishonour, it cost him the greatest self-sacrifice of his life not to order him out yonder in the chilly twilight of the leafless woods to stand before him in that ordeal of combat which, in the code of honour of the Magyar Prince, was the sole tribunal to which a man of honour could appeal. But

she had forbade him to avenge her. He felt that he had no share in her life sufficient to give him title to disobey her. His own love for her told him that this offender was still dear enough to her for his life to be sacred in her sight.

'If I had not loved her,' he thought, 'I could have avenged her without suspicion; but what would it seem to her and to the world?—only that I slew him out of jealous rancour! In her soul she loves him still. Her hate will fade, her love will survive, traitor and hound though he be.'

He motioned Sabran towards one of the empty chambers in the gallery. When he had closed the door of it he spoke with a low, hoarse voice:

'Sir, I have the right as her kinsman, I have the right her brothers would have had, to publicly insult you, to publicly chastise you. But she has commanded me to abstain; she will have no feud between us. I obey her; so must you. I have but one thing to say to you. Once you spoke of suicide. I forbid you to follow up your crimes by causing the unending misery that death by your own hand would bring to her. You have been coward enough. Have courage at least not to leave a woman alone under the disgrace you have brought upon her.'

'Alone!' echoed Sabran. 'She will never admit me to her presence again. She will demand her divorce as soon as ever she has strength to remember and to speak.'

'Do you know her so ill after nine years of marriage? Whatever she do it will be for you to accept it, and not evade your chastisement by the poltroon's refuge of oblivion in the grave. You have said you think yourself my debtor; all the quittance I desire is this. You will obey me when I forbid you to entail on your wife the lifelong remorse that your suicide—however you disguised it—would bring upon her. In obeying her, by holding back my hand from avenging her, I make the greatest sacrifice that she could have demanded. Make yours likewise. It would be easy for you to escape chastisement in death. You must forego that ease, and live. I leave you to your conscience and to her.'

He opened the door and passed down the corridor, his steps echoing on the oaken floor.

In half an hour he had left the house, and gone on his lonely way to Taróc.

Sabran stood mute.

He had lost the power to resent; he knew that if this man chose to strike him across the eyes with his whip he would be within his right. The insults cut him to the bone as though the lash were on him; but he held his peace and bore them, not in submission, but in silence. His profound humiliation, his absolute despair, had broken the nerve in him. He felt that he had no title to look a gentleman in the face, no power to defend himself, whatever outrages were heaped on him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In time the convulsions ceased, the stupor lightened; they began to hope.

The danger had been great, but it was well-nigh past; the vigour and perfection of her strength had enabled her to keep her hold on life. After those few words to her kinsman she spoke seldom, she appeared sunk in silent thought; when the door opened she shrank with a sort of apprehension. Greswold, watching her, said to himself: 'She is afraid lest her husband should enter.'

She never spoke of him or of the children.

Sabran did not dare to ask to see her. When Greswold would fain have urged him, he refused with vehemence.

'I dare not—it would be to insult her more. Only if she summon me—but that she will never do.'

'He has been faithless to her,' thought the old man.

All those weeks of her slow and painful restoration to life she was mute, her lips only moving in reply to the questions of her physicians. It seemed to her strange that when her spiritual and mental life had been poisoned to their source, her bodily life should be able mechanically to gather force, and resume its functions. Had matter so far more resistance than the soul?

Her women were frightened at the look upon her face; it had the rigidity, the changelessness of marble, and all the blood seemed gone out of it for ever.

In after days her heart would speak; remembered happiness, lost beliefs, ruined love, would in their turn have place in her misery; but now all she was sensible of was the unbearable insult, the ineffaceable outrage. She was like a queen who beholds the virgin soil of her kingdom invaded and wasted by a traitor.

Any other thing she would have pardoned—infidelity, indifference, cruelty, any sins of manhood's caprice or passion—but who should pardon this? The sin was not alone against herself; it was against every law of decency and truth that ever she had been taught to hold sacred; it was against all those great dead, who lay with the cross on their breasts and their swords by their side, from whom she had received and treasured the traditions of honour, the purity of a race.

It was those dead knights whom he had smote upon the mouth and mocked, crying to them: 'Lo! your place is mine; my sons will reign in your stead. I have tainted your race for ever; for ever my blood flows with yours.'

The greatness of a great race is a thing far higher than mere

pride. Its instincts are noble and supreme, its obligations are no less than its privileges; it is a great light which streams backward through the darkness of the ages, and if by that light you guide not your footsteps, then are you thrice accursed, holding as you do that lamp of honour in your hands.

So had she always thought; and now he had dashed the lamp in the dust.

Her convalescence came in due course; but the silence, almost absolute silence, which she preserved on the full recovery of her consciousness alarmed her physicians, who had no clue to the cause. Greswold alone, who divined that there was some wrong or disaster which severed her from her husband, guessed that this immutable speechlessness was but the cover and guard of some great sorrow. No tears ever dimmed her eyes or relieved her bursting heart; she lay still, absorbed in mute and terrible retrospection. As her great weakness left her, there came upon her features the colder darker look of her race, the look which he who had betrayed her had always feared. She never spoke of him, nor of the children. Her women would have ventured to bring the children to her, unbidden, but Greswold forbade them; he knew that for the devoted tenderness she bore them to be thus utterly still and changed, some shock must have befallen her so great that the instincts of maternity were momentarily quenched in her, as water springs are dried up by earthquake.

'She never speaks of me, nor of them?' asked Sabran with agony every day of Greswold, and the old man answered him:

'She never speaks at all. She replies to our questions as to her health, she asks briefly for what she needs; no more.'

'The children are innocent!' he said wearily, and his heart had never gone forth to them so much as it did now, when they were shut out like himself from the arms of their mother.

Yet he understood how she shrunk from them—might well almost abhor them—seeing in them, as Vàsàrhely saw, the living proofs of her surrender to a coward and a traitor.

'What can he have done?' mused Greswold. 'Infidelity, perhaps, she would not forgive; but it would not make her thus blind and deaf to the children.'

He passed his days in utter wretchedness; he wandered in the wintry woods for hours, or sat in weary waiting outside her door. He cared nothing what his household thought or guessed. He had forgotten every living creature save herself. When he saw his young sons in the distance he avoided them; he dreaded their guileless questions, the stab of their unconscious words. Again and again he was tempted to blow out his brains, or fling himself from the ice walls that towered above him; but the sense that it would seem to her the last cowardice—the last shame—restrained him.

Sometimes it seemed to him that the tie between them was so

strong, the memories of their past passion so sweet, that even his crime could not part them. Then he remembered of what race she came, of what honour she was the representative and guardian, and his heart sank within him, and he knew that his offence was one beyond all pardon.

The whole household dimly felt that some great grief had fallen on their master. His attitude, his absence from his wife's room, the arrival of Prince Vàsàrhely, the abrupt departure of the Countess Brancka, all told them that some calamity had come, though they were loyally silent one to the other, their service having been always one of devotion and veneration for their mistress, since they were all Tauern-born people, bred up by their fathers in loyalty to Hohenszalras.

'The first who speaks of aught he suspects goes for ever,' old Hubert had said to his numerous *dienerschaft* in the hearing of them all, when one of the pages—he who had borne the note to his master in Olga Brancka's rooms—ventured to hint that he thought some evil was abroad, and would part their lord and lady. But all the faithful silence of their attendants could not wholly conceal from the elder children that something wrong, some greater sorrow even than their mother's illness, was hanging over the old house. They were dull and vaguely alarmed. They had not even the kindly presence of the Princess, who, if she sometimes wearied them with admonitions, treated them with tenderness, and atoned for her homilies by unending gifts. They were very unhappy, though they said little, and wandered like little ghosts among the wintry woods and in their spacious play-rooms. They were tended, amused, provided for in all the same ways as usual. There were all their pastimes and playthings; all their comforts and habits were unaltered; but from the background of their sports and studies the stately figure of their mother was missing, with her serene smile and her happy power of checking all dispute or turbulence with a mere word or a mere glance.

The winter had come at a stroke, as it does without warning oftentimes in the old Archduchy; the snow falling fast and thick, the waters freezing in a night, the hills and valleys growing white and silent between a sunset and a sunset.

Their sledges carried them like lightning over the frozen roads, and their little skates bore them swift as circling swallows over the ice. It was the season Bela loved so well; but he had no joy in anything. There was no twilight hour in the white-room at their mother's feet, whilst she told them legends and stories; there was no moment in the mornings when she came into their study and found their little puzzled brains weary over a Latin declension or a crabbed page of history, and made all clear to them by a few lucid graphic sentences; there was no possible hope that, when the day was broad and bright over the wintry land, she would call to them to bring the dogs and go with her and her black horses

through the glittering forests, where every bough was heavy with the diamonds of the frost. To the little boys it seemed as if the whole world had grown suddenly silent, and they were left all alone in it.

Their troops of attendants were no more consolation to them than his crowd of courtiers is to a bereaved sovereign.

Then, again, when Egon Vàsàrhely had by chance met them he had looked at them strangely, and had always turned away without a greeting. 'And when I was quite little he was so kind,' thought Bela, whose pride seemed falling from him like a useless ragged garment.

'It's all since Madame Olga came,' he said once to his brother. 'She is a bad, bad woman. She was rude to our mother.'

'I thought ladies were always good?' said Gela.

'They are much wickeder than men,' said Bela, with premature wisdom. 'At least, when they *are* wicked. I heard a gentleman say so in Paris.'

'What could she do when she was here, do you think?' asked Gela, with a tremor.

'I do not know,' said Bela, gravely and sadly. 'But I am sure that she hated our mother.'

He was sure that all the evil had come from her; he had heard of evil spirits, the people believed in them, and had charms against them. She was one of them. Had she not tempted him to disobedience and revolt, with her pictures of the grand gaiety, the magnificent gatherings, the heart-rousing 'Halali!' of the Chantilly hunt?

Bela did not forget.

He would have cut off his little right hand, now, never to have vexed his mother.

He was yet more sorrowful still for his father. Though they were not allowed to approach their mother's apartments, he had disobeyed the injunction more than once, and had seen Sabran walking to and fro that long gallery, or seated with bent head and folded arms on one of the oaken benches. With all his boldness Bela had not dared to approach that melancholy figure; but it had haunted his dreams, and troubled him sorely as he rode and drove, and played and did his lessons. The snow had come on the second week of his mother's illness, and when he visited his riding-pony in its loose box on these frosted days on which he could not use it, he buried his face in its abundant mane, and wept bitterly, though he boasted that he never cried.

Eight weeks passed by after the departure of Olga Brancka before his mother could leave her bed; and all that while, save for a brief question now and again as to their health, put to her physician, she had never mentioned the children once. 'She does not want us any more,' said Bela, with the great tears dimming his bold eyes.

In the ninth week she was lifted on to a great chair, placed beside one of the windows, and she turned her weary gaze on to the snow world without. What use was life? Why had it returned to her? All emotion of maternity, all memory of love, were for the time killed in her. She was only conscious of an intolerable indignity, for which neither God nor man could give her consolation.

She would have gone barefoot all the world over sooner than be again in his presence, had not the imperious courage which was the strongest instinct of her nature refused to confess itself unable to meet the man who had wronged her. In the long dark night which these past two months had seemed to her, she had brought herself to face the inevitable end. She had nerved herself to be her own judge and his. Weaker women would have made the world their judge; she did not. She did not even seek the counsel of that Church of which she was a reverent daughter. Her priest had no access to her.

'God must see my torture, but no other shall,' she said in her heart, nor should the world ever have her fate to make an hour's jesting wonder of, as is its way with all calamity. It would be her lifelong companion; a rusted iron for ever piercing deeper and deeper into her flesh; but she would dwell alone with it—unpitied. The men of her race had always been their own lawgivers, their own avengers; she would be hers.

Once she bade them bring her pens and ink, and she began to use them. Then she laid them down, and tore in two an unfinished letter. 'Only cowards write to save themselves from pain,' she thought, and on the tenth day after she had risen from her bed she said to Greswold:

'Tell the women to leave me alone, and ask—my husband—to come here.'

She said the last words as if they choked her in their utterance. Her husband he was; nothing could change the past.

The old man hesitated, and ventured to suggest that any exertion was dangerous; would it be wise, he asked, to speak of what might agitate her? And thereon he paused and stammered, knowing that it was not his place to have observed that there was any estrangement between them.

She looked at him with suspicion.

'Have I spoken in my sleep or in my unconsciousness?' she thought.

Aloud she said only:

'Be so good as to go to him at once.'

He bowed and went, and to himself mused:

'Since she loves him, her heart will melt when she meets his eyes. His sin after all cannot be beyond those which women have forgiven a million times over since first creation began.'

Yet in himself he was not sure of that. The Szalras had had

many great and many generous qualities, but forgiveness of offence had never been among them.

She remained still, her hands folded on her knees, her face set as though it were cast in bronze. The great bedchamber, with its hangings of pale blue plush and its silver-mounted furniture, was dim and shadowy in the greyness of a midwinter afternoon. Doors opened, here to the bath and dressing chambers, there to the oratory, yonder to the apartments of Sabran. She looked across to the last, and a shudder passed over her; a sense of sickness and revulsion came on her.

She sat still and waited; she was too weak to go farther than this room. She was wrapped in a long loose gown of white satin, lined and trimmed with sable. There were black bearskins beneath her feet; the atmosphere was warmed by hot air, and fragrant with some bowls full of forced roses, which her women had placed there at noon. The grey light of the fading afternoon touched the silver scroll-work of the bed, and the silver frame of one large mirror, and fell on her folded hands and on the glister of their rings. Her head leaned backward against the high carved ebony of her chair. Her face was stern and bitterly cold, as that of Maria Theresa when she signed the loss of Silesia.

He approached from his own apartments, and came timidly and with a slow step forward. He did not dare to salute her, or go near to her; he stood like a banished man, disgraced, a few yards from her seat.

Two months had gone by since he had seen her. When he entered he read on her features that he must leave all hope behind.

Her whole frame shrank within her as she saw him there, but she gave no sign of what she felt. Without looking at him she spoke, in a voice quite firm though it was faint from feebleness.

'I have but little to say to you, but that little is best said, not written.'

He did not reply; his eyes were watching her with a terrible appeal, a very agony of longing. They had not rested on her for two months. She had been near the gates of the grave, within the shadow of death. He would have given his life for a word of pity, a touch, a regard—and he dared not approach her!

She did not look at him. After that first glance, in which there had been so much of horror, of revulsion, she did not once look towards him. Her face had the immutability of a mask of stone; so many wretched days and haunted nights had she spent nerving herself for this inevitable moment that no emotion was visible in her; into her agony she had poured her pride, and it sustained her, as the plaster poured into the dry bones at Pompeii makes the skeleton stand erect, the ashes speak.

'After that which you have told me,' she said, after a moment's silence in which he fancied she must hear the throbbing of his

heart, 'you must know that my life cannot be lived out beside yours. The law gives you many rights, no doubt, but I believe you will not be so base as to enforce them.'

'I have no rights!' he muttered. 'I am a criminal before the law. The law will free you from me, if you choose.'

'I do not choose,' she said coldly; 'you understand me ill. I do not carry my wrongs or my woes to others. What you have told me is known only to Prince Vàsàrhely and to the Countess Brancka. He will be silent; he has the power to make her so. The world need know nothing. Can you think that I shall be its informant?'

'If you divorce me——' he murmured.

A quiver of bitter anger passed over her features, but she retained her self-control.

'Divorce? What could divorce do for me? Could it destroy the past? Neither Church nor Law can undo what you have done. Divorce would make me feel that in the past I had been your mistress, not your wife, that is all.'

She breathed heavily, and again pressed her hand on her breast.

'Divorce!' she repeated. 'Neither priest nor judge can efface a past as you clean a slate with a sponge! No power, human or divine, can free *me*, purify *me*, wash your dishonoured blood from your children's veins.'

She almost lost her self-control; her lips trembled, her eyes were full of flame, her brow was black with passion. With a violent effort she restrained herself; invective or reproach seemed to her low and coarse and vile.

He was silent; his greatest fear, the torture of which had harassed him sleeping and waking ever since he had placed his secret in her hands, was banished at her words. She would seek no divorce—the children would not be disgraced—the world of men would not learn his shame; and yet as he heard a deeper despair than any he had ever known came over him. She was but as those sovereigns of old who scorned the poor tribunals of man's justice because they held in their own might the power of so much heavier chastisement.

'I shall not seek for a legal separation,' she resumed; 'that is to say, I shall not, unless you force me to do so to protect myself from you. If you fail to abide by the conditions I shall prescribe, then you will compel me to resort to any means that may shelter me from your demands. But I do not think you will endeavour to force on me conjugal rights which you obtained over me by a fraud.'

All that she desired was to end quickly the torture of this interview, from which her courage had not permitted her to shrink. She had to defend herself because she would not be defended by others, and she only sought to strike swiftly and unerringly so as

to spare herself and him all needless or lingering throes. Her speech was brief, for it seemed to her that no human language held expression deep and vast enough to measure the wrong done to her, could she seek to give it utterance.

She would not have made a sound had any murderer stabbed her body; she would not now show the death-wound of her soul and honour to this man who had stabbed both to the quick. Other women would have made their moan aloud, and cursed him. The daughter of the Szalras choked down her heart in silence, and spoke as a judge speaks to one condemned by man and God.

'I wish no words between us,' she said, with renewed calmness. 'You know your sin; all your life has been a lie. I will keep me and mine back from vengeance; but do not mistake—God may pardon you, I never! What I desired to say to you is that henceforth you shall wholly abandon the name you stole; you shall assign the land of Romaris to the people; you shall be known only as you have been known here of late, as the Count von Idrac. The title was mine to give, I gave it to you; no wrong is done save to my fathers, who were brave men.'

He remained silent; all excuse he might have offered seemed as if from him to her it would be but added outrage. He was her betrayer, and she had the power to avenge betrayal; naught that she could say or do could seem unjust or undeserved beside the enormity of her irreparable wrongs.

'The children?' he muttered faintly, in an unuttered supplication.

'They are mine,' she said, always with the same unchanging calm that was cold as the frozen earth without. 'You will not, I believe, seek to enforce your title to dispute them with me?'

He gave a gesture of denial.

He, the wrong-doer, could not realise the gulf which his betrayal had opened betwixt himself and her. On him all the ties of their past passion were sweet, precious, unchanged in their dominion. He could not realise that to her all these memories were abhorred, poisoned, stamped with ineffable shame; he could not believe that she who had loved the dust that his feet had brushed could now regard him as one leprous and accursed. He was slow to understand that his sin had driven him out of her life for evermore.

Commonly it is the woman on whom the remembrance of love has an enthralling power when love itself is traitor; commonly it is the man on whom the past has little influence, and to whom its appeal is vainly made; but here the position was reversed. He would have pleaded by it: she refused to acknowledge it, and remained as adamant before it. His nerve was too broken, his conscience was too heavily weighted for him to attempt to rebel against her decisions or sway her judgment. If she had bidden him go out and slay himself he would gladly have obeyed.

'Once you said,' he murmured timidly, 'that repentance washes out all crimes. Will you count my remorse as nothing?'

'You would have known no remorse had your secret never been discovered!'

He shrank as from a blow.

'That is not true,' he said wearily, 'But how can I hope you will believe me?'

She answered nothing.

'Once you told me that there was no sin you would not pardon me!' he muttered.

She replied:

'We pardon sin; we do not pardon baseness.'

She paused and put her hand to her heart; then she spoke again in that cold, forced, measured voice, which seemed on his ear as hard and pitiless as the strokes of an iron hammer, beating life out beneath it.

'You will leave Hohenszalras; you will go where you will; you have the revenues of Idrac. Any other financial arrangements that you may wish to make I will direct my lawyers to carry out. If the revenues of Idrac be insufficient to maintain you——'

'Do not insult me—so,' he murmured, with a suffocating sound in his voice, as though some hand were clutching at his throat.

'Insult *you*!' she echoed, with a terrible scorn.

She resumed, with the same inflexible calmness:

'You must live as becomes the rank due to my husband. The world need suspect nothing. There is no obligation to make it your confidante. If anyone were wronged by the usurpation of the name you took it would be otherwise, but as it is you will lose nothing in the eyes of men; society will not flatter you the less. The world will only believe that we are tired of one another, like so many. The blame will be placed on me. You are a brilliant comedian, and can please and humour it. I am known to be a cold, grave, eccentric woman, a recluse, of whom it will deem it natural that you are weary. Since you allow that I have the right to separate from you—to deal with you as with a criminal—you will not seek to recall your existence to me. You will meet my abstinence by the only amends you can make to me. Let me forget—as far as I am able—let me forget that ever you have lived!'

He staggered slightly, as if under some sword-stroke from an unseen hand. A great faintness came upon him. He had been prepared for rage, for reproach, for bitter tears, for passionate vengeance; but this chill, passionless, disdainful severance from him for all eternity he had never dreamed of: it crept like the cold of frost into his very marrow; he was speechless and mute with shame. If she had dragged him through all the tribunals of the world she would have hurt him and humiliated him far less.

Better all the hooting gibes of the whole earth than this one voice, so cold, so inflexible, so full of utter scorn!

Despite her bodily weakness she rose to her full height, and for the first time looked at him.

'You have heard me,' she said; 'now go!'

But instead, blindly, not knowing what he did, he fell at her feet.

'But you loved me,' he cried, 'you loved me so well!'

The tears were coursing down his cheeks.

She drew the sables of her robe from his touch.

'Do not recall *that*,' she said, with a bitter smile. 'Women of my race have killed men before now for less outrage than yours has been to me.'

'Kill me!' he cried to her. 'I will kiss your hand.'

She was mute.

He clung to her gown with an almost convulsive supplication.

'Believe, at least, that *I* loved *you*!' he cried, beside himself in his misery and impotence. 'Believe that, at the least!——'

She turned from him.

'Sir, I have been your dupe for ten long years; I can be so no more!'

Under that intolerable insult he rose slowly, and his eyes grew blind, and his limbs trembled, but he walked from her, and sought not again either her pity or her pardon.

On the threshold he looked back once. She stood erect, one hand resting upon the carved work of her high oak chair; cold, stately, motionless, the furred velvets falling to her feet like a queen's robes.

He looked, then passed the threshold and closed the door behind him. He walked down the corridors blindly, not knowing whither he went.

They were dusky, for the twilight of the winter's day had come. He did not see a little figure which was coming towards him until the child had stopped him with a timid outstretched hand.

'Shall we never see her again?' said Bela, in a hushed voice. 'It is so long!—so long! Oh, please do tell me!'

Sabran paused, and looked down on the boy with blood-shot burning eyes. For a moment or so he did not answer; then, with a sudden movement, he drew his son to him, lifted him in his arms, and kissed him passionately.

'You will see her, not I—not I!' he said with a sob like a woman's. 'Bela, listen! Be obedient to her, adore her, have no will but hers; be loyal, be truthful, be noble in all your words and all your thoughts, and then in time perhaps—perhaps—she will pardon you for being also mine!'

The child, terrified, clung to him with all his force, dimly

conscious of some great agony near him, but far beyond his comprehension or consolation.

'I love you, I will always love you!' he said, with his hands clasped around his father's throat.

'Love your mother!' said Sabran, as he kissed the boy's soft cheeks, made wet by his own tears; then he released the little frightened form, and went himself away into the darkness.

In a little time, with no word to any living soul there, he had harnessed some horses with his own hands, and in the fast-falling gloom of the night had driven from Hohenszalras.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BELA heard the galloping hoofs of the horses, and ran with his fleet feet, quick as a fawn's, down the grand staircase and out on to the terrace, where the winds of the north were driving with icy cold and furious force over a world of snow. With his golden hair streaming in the blast, he strained his eyes into the gloom of the avenues below, but the animals had vanished from sight. He turned sadly and went into the Rittersaal.

'Is that my father who has gone?' he said in a low voice to Hubert, who was there. The old servant, with the tears in his eyes, told him that it was. A groom had come to him to say that their lord had made ready a sledge and driven away without a word to any one of them, while the night was falling apace.

Bela heard and said nothing; he had his mother's power of silence in sorrow. He climbed the staircase silently, and went and listened in the corridor where his father had waited and watched so long. His heart was heavy, and ached with an indefinable dread. He did not seek Gela. It seemed to him that this sorrow was his alone. He alone had heard his father's farewell words; he alone had seen his father weep.

All the selfishness and vanity of his little soul were broken up and vanished, and the first grief he had ever known filled up their empty place. He had adored his father with an unreasoning blind devotion, like a dog's; and this intense affection had been increased rather than repressed by the indifference with which he had been treated.

His father was gone; he felt sure that it was for ever: if he could not see his mother he thought he could not live. To the mind of a child such gigantic and unutterable terrors rise up under the visitation of a vague alarm. Abroad in the woods, or under any bodily pain or fear, he was as brave as a lion whelp, but he had enough of the German mystic in his blood to be imaginative and visionary when trouble touched him. The sight

of his father's grief had shaken his nerves, and filled him with the first passionate pity he had ever known. A man so great, so strong, so wonderful in prowess, so far aloof from himself as Sabran had always seemed to his little son, to be so overwhelmed in such helpless sorrow, appeared to Bela so terrible a thing that an intense fear took for the first time possession of his little valiant soul. His father could slay all the great beasts of the forests; could break in the horse fresh from the freedom of the plains; could breast the stormy waters like a petrel; could scale the highest heights of the mountains. And yet someone—something—had had power to break down all his strength, and make him flee in wretchedness.

It could not be his mother who had done this thing? No, no! never, never! It had been done because she was lying ill, helpless, perhaps was dead.

As that last dread came over him he lost all control over himself. He knew what death was. A little girl he had been fond of in Paris had died whilst he was her playmate, and he had seen her lying, so waxen, so cold, so unresponsive, when he had laid his lilies on her little breast. A great despair came over him, and made him reckless what he did. In the desperation of terror blent with love, he started up and ran to the door of his mother's apartments. It yielded to his pressure; he ran across the antechamber and the dressing-rooms, and pulled aside the tapestry.

Then he saw her; seated at the further side of the great bedchamber. There was a feeble grey light from the western sky, to which the casements of the chamber turned. It was very pale and dim, but by it he saw her lying back, rigid and colourless, the white satin, the dusky fur, the deep shadows gathered around her. There was that in her look and in her attitude which made the child's heart grow cold, as his father's had done.

She was alone; for she had bade her women not come unless she summoned them. Bela stood and gazed, his pulses beating loud and hard; then with a cry he ran forward and sprang to her, and threw his arms about her.

'Oh, mother, mother, you are not dead!' he cried. 'Oh, speak to me; do speak to me! He is gone away for ever and ever, and if we cannot see you we shall all die. Oh, do not look at me so! Pray, pray, do not. Shall I fetch Lili?——'

In his vague terror he thought to disarm her by his little sister's name. She had thrust him away from her, and was looking with cold and cruel eyes on his face, that was so like the face of his father. She was thinking:

'You are the son of a serf, of a traitor, of a liar, of a bastard, and yet you are *mine*! I bore you, and yet you are his. You are shame incarnate. You are the living sign of my dishonour. You bear my name—my untainted name—and yet you were begotten by him.'

Bela dropped down at her feet as his father had done.

'Oh, do not look at me so,' he sobbed. 'Oh, mother, what have I done? I have tried to be good all this while. He is gone away, and he is so unhappy, and he bade me never vex or disobey you, and I never will.'

His voice was broken in his sobs, and he leaned his head upon her knees, and clasped them with both his arms. She looked down on him, and drew a deep shuddering breath. The holiest joy of a woman's life was, for her, poisoned at the springs.

Then, at the child's clinging embrace, at his piteous and innocent grief, the motherhood in her welled up under the frost of her heart, and all its long-suffering and infinite tenderness revived, and overcame the horror that wrestled with it. She raised him up and strained him to her breast.

'You are mine, you are mine!' she murmured over him. 'I must forget all else.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE spring dawned once more on Hohenszalras, and the summer followed it. The waters leapt, the woods rejoiced, the gardens blossomed, and the children played; but the house was silent as a house in which the dead are lying. There was indeed a corpse there—the corpse of buried joy, of murdered love, of ruined honour.

The household resumed its calm order, the routine of the days was unbroken, the quiet yet stately life had been taken up in its course as though it had never been altered; and wherever young children are there will always be some shout of mirth, some sound of happy laughter somewhere; the children laugh as the birds sing, though those amidst them bury their dead.

But the house was as a house of mourning, and the sense of death was there as utterly as though he who was gone had been laid in his grave amidst the silver figures and the marble tombs in the Chapel of the Knights. No one ever heard a sigh from her lips, or ever saw the tears beneath her eyelids; but the sense of her bereavement, as one terrible, inconsolable, eternal, weighed like a pall on all those who were about her; the lowliest peasant on her estates understood that the sanctity of some untold woe had built up a wall of granite between her and all the living world.

She had always been grateful to fate for her old home set amidst the silence of the mountains, but she had never been so thankful for it as now. It shielded her from all the observation and interrogation of the world; no one came thither unbidden.

unless she chose, no visitant would ever break that absolute solitude which was the sole approach to peace that she would ever know. Even her relatives could not pass the icy barrier of her cold denial. They wearied her for awhile with written importunities and suggestions, hinted wonder, delicately expressed questions. But they made no way into her confidence; they soon left her to herself and to her children. They said angrily to themselves that she had been always whimsical and a solitary; they had been certain that soon or late that ill-advised union would be dissolved in some way, private or public. They were all people haughty, sensitive, abhorrent of scandal; they were content that the separation should be by mutual consent and noiseless.

She had had letters from Egon Vàsàrhely full of delicate tenderness; in the last he had asked with humility if he might visit Hohenszalras. She had written in return to him: 'You have my gratitude and my affection, but until we are quite old we will not meet. Leave me alone; you can do naught for me.'

He obeyed; he understood the loyalty to one disloyal which made her refuse to meet him, of whose loyalty she was so sure.

He sent a magnificent present to the child who was his namesake, and wrote to her no more save upon formal anniversaries.

The screen of her dark forests protected her from all the cruel comment and examination of the men and women of her world. She knew them well enough to know that when she ceased to appear amidst them, when she ceased to contribute to their entertainment, when she ceased to bid them to her houses, she would soon cease also to be remembered by them; even their wonder would live but for a day. If they blamed her in their ignorance, their blame would be as indifferent as their praise had been.

She had been told by her lawyers that her husband had refused to touch a coin of the revenues of Idrac, and had once visited them to sign a power of procuration, whereby they could receive those revenues and set them aside in accumulation for his son Gela. That was all she heard. Whither he had gone she was ignorant. She did not make any effort to learn. On the night following his departure a peasant had been sent with the sleigh and horses home to Hohenszalras. The solicitors of Salzburg had seen him a week or two later at their ancient offices under the Calvarienburg: that was all. She had bade him let it be forgotten that he had ever lived beside her. He had obeyed her.

The days, and weeks, and months went on, and his place knew him no more. The jägers, seated round their fires in their forest huts, spoke longingly and wonderingly of his absence. The hunters, when they brought down a steinbock with unusual effort or skill, said that it had been a shot that would have been worthy of his praise. His old friend wept for him with the

slow sad tears of age, and the child Bela prayed for his return every night that he knelt down before his crucifix. But his name never passed his wife's lips, and was never written by her hand. She had given her all with the superb generosity of a sovereign; she had in her wrongs the intense abiding unutterable disgust of a sovereign betrayed and outraged. When she let grief have its way, it was when no eyes beheld her, when the night was down and solitude sheltered her.

She had never spoken of what had befallen her to any human ear; not even to her priests. The horror of it was buried in her own breast; its sepulchre all the waste and ashes of her perished joys.

When the Princess Ottilie, weeping, entreated to be told the worst, she answered briefly:

'He betrayed me. How, matters nothing.'

More than that she never said. The Princess supposed that she spoke of the disloyalty of the passions, and dared not urge her to more confidence. 'I warned him that she would never forgive if he were faithless,' she thought, and wept for hours at her orisons, her gentle soul resenting the inflexibility of this mute immutable bitterness of offended love.

Too proud and too delicate to intrude undesired into any confidence, and too tender-hearted to utter censure aloud to one she loved, the Princess showed in a thousand ways without speech that she considered there were cruelty and egotism in her unexplained separation from her husband. Believing as she did that his offence was that conjugal infidelity which, however blameable, is one of those injuries which all women who love forgive, and which those who do not love endure in silence from patience and dignity, herself offended at her exclusion from all knowledge of the facts, she said but little; but her whole attitude was one of restrained reproach.

'With time she will change,' she said to herself. But time passed on, and she could see no change, nor any hope of it.

The grave severe beauty of their mother had a vague terror for her children. She never now smiled at their mirth, laughed at their sports, or joined in their pastimes. She was almost always silent. Bela longed to throw his arms about her knees, and cry out to her: 'Mother, mother, where is *he*?' But he did not venture to do so. Without his reasoning upon it, the child instinctively felt that her frozen calm covered depths of suffering which he did not dare disturb. He had been so completely terrified once, that the remembrance of that hour lay like ice upon his bright courage. Even the younger ones felt something of the same fear. Their mother remembered them, cared for them, was heedful that their needs of body and of brain were perfectly supplied. But they felt, as young children feel what they cannot explain, that they were outside her life, insufficient for her, even fraught with intense

pain to her. Often when she stooped to kiss them a shudder passed over her; often when they came into her presence she looked away from them, as though the sight of them stung and blinded her. They never heard an angry word from her lips, but even repeated anger would have kept them at less distance from her than did that mute majesty of a grief they could not comprehend.

She was more severe to all her dependants; she never became unjust, but she was often stern; the children at the schools saw her smile no more. Santa Claus still filled their stockings on Christmas Eve; but of the stately figure which moved amidst them, robed in black, they grew afraid. She seldom went to them or to her peasantry. Bela and Gela were sent with her winter gifts. In the summer the sennerins never now saw her enter their high huts and drink a cup of milk, talking with them of their herds and flocks.

She was tranquil as of old. She fulfilled the duties of her properties, and attended to all the demands made upon her by her people; her liberalities were unchanged, her justice was unwarped, her mind was clear and keen. But she never smiled, even on her young daughter; and the little Lili said once to her brothers:

'Do you know, I think our mother is changing to marble. She will soon be of stone, like the statues in the chapel. When I touch her I feel cold.'

Bela was angered.

'You are ungrateful, you little child,' he said to his sister. 'Who loves us, who cares for us, who thinks of us, as our mother does? If her lips are cold, perhaps her heart is broken. We are only children; we can do so little.'

He had treasured the words of his father in his soul. He had never told them, except to Gela, but they were always present to him. He alone had seen and heard enough to understand that some dire disaster had shattered in pieces the beautiful life which his parents had led together. He had received an indelible impression from the two scenes of that evening. Without comprehending, he had felt that something had befallen them, which struck at their honour no less than at their peace. He had a clear conception of what honour was; it was the first tuition that Wanda von Szalras gave her children. Vague as his understanding of their grief had been, it had been sufficient to strike at that pride which was inborn in him. He was like the Dauphin of whom he had thought in Paris. He had seen his father driven from his throne; he had seen his mother in the sackcloth and ashes of affliction. He was humiliated, bewildered, softened; he, who had believed himself omnipotent because all the people of the Iselthal ran to do his bidding, felt how helpless he was in truth. He was shut out from his mother's confidence; he had been powerless to console her or

to retain his father; there was something even in himself from which his mother shrank. What had his father said? 'She will in time pardon you for being mine.' What had been the meaning of those strange words? And where had his father gone?

When the summer came and Bela rode through the glad green woods, his heart was heavy. Would his father never ride there any more? Bela had often watched, himself unseen, the fiery horse that bore the man he loved come plunging and leaping through bough and brake till it passed him as though the wind bore it. He had always thought as he had watched, 'When I grow up I will be just what he is'; and now that splendid and gracious figure which had been always present on the horizon of his child's mind, magnified and glorified like the illuminated figures in the painted chronicles, was no more there—had faded utterly away in the dusk and the snow of that wintry twilight.

A thousand times was the question to his mother on his lips: 'Will he never come back? Shall we never see him again?' But he dared not speak it when he saw that look of a revulsion they could not comprehend always upon her face.

'He bade me never vex her,' Bela thought, and obeyed.

'I wonder if ever he thinks of us,' he said once to Gela, as their ponies walked down one of the grassy rides of the home woods.

'Perhaps he is dead,' said Gela, in a hushed, wistful voice.

'How dare you say that, Gela?' said his brother, angry from an intolerable pain. 'If he were—were—*that*, we should be told it. There would be masses in the chapel. We should have black clothes. Oh no! he is not dead. I should know it, I am sure I should know it. He would send down some angel to tell me.'

'Why do you care so much for him?' said Gela, very low. 'It must be he who has made our mother so changed, so unhappy; and it is she whom we should love most. You say even he told you so.'

Bela's lips unclosed to loose an angry answer. He was thinking: 'It is she who sent him away, she who made him weep.' But his loyalty checked it; he would not utter what he thought, even to his brother.

'I think he would not wish us to talk of it,' he said gravely and sadly. 'We will pray for him; that is all we can do.'

'And for her,' said Gela, under his breath.

They were both mute, and let the bridles lie on their ponies' necks as they rode home quietly and sorrowfully in the still summer afternoon to the great house, which, with all its thousand casements gleaming in the sun, seemed to them so silent, so empty, so deserted now. Bela looked up at the banner, with its deep red and its blazoned gold streaming on a westerly wind. 'The flag would be half-mast high if it were *that*,' he thought, his heart

wrung by the dread which Gela had suggested to him. He had seen the banner lowered when Prince Lilienhöhe had died.

On the lawn under the terrace the other children were playing with little painted balloons; the boys did not go to them, but riding round to the stables entered the house by the side entrance. Gela went to his violin, which he loved better than any toy, and studied seriously. Bela wandered wearily over the building, tormented by the doubt which his brother had put in his thoughts. They were always enjoined to keep to their own wing of the house; but he often broke the rule, as he did most others. He walked listlessly along the innumerable galleries, and up and down the grand staircases, his St. Hubert hound following his steps. His face was very pale, his little hands were folded behind his back, his head was bent. He knew that the Latin and Greek for the morrow were all unprepared, but he could not think of them. He was thinking only: 'If it should be, if it should be?'

He came at last to the door of the library. It was there that his mother now spent most of her time. She took long rides alone, always alone; and often chose for them the wildest weather. When she was indoors, she passed her time in unremitting application to all the business of her estates. He opened the great oak door very softly, and saw her seated at the table; Donau and Neva, who now were old, were lying near her feet. She was studying some papers. The sunset glow came through the painted casements and warmed all the light about her, but by its contrast, her attitude, her expression, her features, looked only the graver, the colder, the more colourless. Her gown was black, her pearls were about her throat, her profile was severe, her cheek, turned to the light, was pale and thin. She did not see the little gallant figure of her son in his white summer riding-clothes, and with his golden hair cut across his brows, looking like a boy's portrait by Reynolds.

He stood a moment irresolute; then he went across the long room and stood before her, and bowed as he knew he ought to do. She started and turned her head and saw the pallor of the child's face. She put out her hand to him; it was very thin, and the rings were large upon it. He saw a contraction on her features as of pain; it was but of a moment, because he looked so like his father.

'What is it, Bela?' she said to him. 'You ought not to come here.'

His lower lip quivered. He hesitated; then, gathering all his courage, said timidly:

'May I ask you just one thing?'

'Surely, my child—are you afraid of me?'

It struck her, with a sudden sense of contrition, that she had made the children afraid of her. She had never thought of it before.

Bela hesitated once more, then said boldly:

'Gela said to day *he* might be dead. Oh, if he ever die, will you please tell me? I shall think of it day and night.'

Her face changed terribly; the darker passions of her nature were spoken on it.

'I have forbidden you to speak of your father, if it be him you mean,' she said sternly and very coldly.

But Bela, though frightened, clung to his one thought.

'But he may die!' he said piteously. 'Will you tell me? Please, will you tell me? He might be dead now—we never hear.'

She leaned her arm upon the table, and covered her eyes with her hand. She was silent. She strove with herself so as not to treat the child with harshness. Though he hurt her so cruelly, he was right. She honoured him for his courage.

'If you will only tell me that,' said the boy, with tears in his throat, 'I will never ask anything else—never—never!'

'Why do you cling so to his memory?' she said, with a sudden impatience of jealousy. 'He never took heed of you.'

'I was so little,' said Bela, with a sigh. 'But I loved him—oh! I have always loved him—and I was the last to see him that night.'

'I know!' she said harshly, ashamed meanwhile of her own harshness; for how could the child suspect the torture his words were to her? What had his father given her beautiful boy?—disgraced descent, sullied blood, the heritage of falsehood and of dishonour. Yet the boy loved his memory better than he loved her presence. And the time had been, not so long passed, when she would have recognised the preference with fond and generous delight.

Bela stood beside her, his eyes watching her with timid interrogation, with longing appeal. The look upon his face went to her heart. She knew not what to say to him. She had hoped he would be always silent, and forget, as children usually forget.

'You are right to feel so,' she said to him at last, with a violent effort. 'Cherish his memory, and pray for him always; but do not speak of him to me. When you are grown to manhood, if I be living then, you shall hear what has parted your father and me; you shall judge us yourself. But there are many years to that; many weary years for me. I shall endeavour that they shall be happy ones for you; but you must never ask me, never speak, of him. I gave you that command that night; but you are very young, you have forgotten.'

Bela listened with a sinking heart. He gathered from her words that his father's absence was, as he had feared, for ever.

'I had not forgotten,' he said in a whisper, for the moment was terrible to him. 'But if—if what Gela said should ever be,

will you tell me that? I will not disobey again, but pray—pray—tell me *that.*'

His mother's face seemed to him to grow colder and colder, paler and paler, till she scarcely looked a living woman.

'I will tell you—if I know,' she said, with a pause between each slow spoken word. Then the only smile that had come upon her lips for many months came there; a smile sadder than tears, more bitter than all scorn.

'He will outlive me, fear not,' she said, as she put out her hand to the child. 'Now leave me, my dear; I am occupied.'

Bela touched her hand with his lips, which, despite his will, quivered as he did so. He felt that he had failed, that he had disobeyed and hurt her, that he had been unable to show one tenth of all the feelings which choked him with their force and longing. He hung his head as he went sorrowfully away. 'She may not know! She may not know!' he thought, with terror.

He looked back at her timidly as he closed the door. She had resumed her writing; the red sunset light fell on her black gown, on her stately head, on her profile, cut clear as on a cameo.

He dared not return. . . . . .

The mother whom he had known in other years, on whose knee he had rested his head as she told him tales in the twilight hour, whose hand had caressed his curls, whose smile had rewarded his stammering Latin or his hardly achieved line of handwriting, who had stooped over him in his drowsy dreams, and made him think of angels, the mother who had said to Egon Vàsàrhely: 'This is my Bela: love him a little for my sake,' seemed as far from him as though she were lying in her tomb.

She, when the tapestry had fallen behind the slender figure of her little son, continued to write on. It was hard, dry matter that she wrote of; the condition of her miners amongst the silver ore of the north-east. She forced her mind to it, she compelled her will and her hand; that was all. These things depended on her; she would not neglect them, she strove to find in them that distraction which lighter natures seek in pleasure. But in vain she now endeavoured to compel her attention to the details she was following and correcting; soon they became to her so confused that they were unintelligible; for once her intelligence refused to obey her will. The child's words haunted her. She laid down her pen, pushed aside the reports and the letter in which she was replying to them, and rising paced to and fro the long polished floor of the library.

It was here that he had first bowed before her on that night when Hohenszalras had sheltered him from the storm.

'We had a mass of thanksgiving!' she thought.

The child's words haunted her. Not to know even *that* when they had passed nine years together in the closest of all human ties! For the first time the misgiving came to her, had she been

too harsh? No; it would have been impossible to have done less; many would have done far more in chastisement of the fraud upon their honour and good faith. Yet as she recalled their many hours of joy it seemed as if she had remembered these too little. Then again she scouted her own weakness. What had been all his life beside her save one elaborate lie?

The broad shafts of the blazing sunset slanted across the inlaid woods of the floor which she paced; the windows were open, the birds sang in the rose boughs and ivy without. The summers would come thus, one after another, with their intolerable light, and the intolerable laughter of the unconscious children; and she would carry her burden through them, though the day was for ever dark for her.

Time had been when she had thought that she should die if he were lost to her; but she lived on and marvelled at herself. Her very soul seemed to have gone from her with the destruction of her love. Her body seemed to her but a mere shell, an inanimate pulseless thing. The only thing that seemed alive in her was shame.

She paced now up and down the long room while the sunset died and the grey evening dulled the painted panes of the casements. The boy's question had pierced through her frozen serenity. It was true that she had no knowledge where his father was; he might be dead, he might be killed by his own hand—she knew nothing. She had bidden him let her forget that he had ever lived beside her, and he had obeyed her. He might be in the world of men, careless and content, consoled by others, or he might be in his grave.

All she knew was that he never touched the revenues of Idrac.

She paused on the same spot where he had stood before her first, with his fair beauty, his courtier's smile, his easy grace, the very prince of gentlemen; and her hands clenched the folds of her gown as she thought—'the first of actors! Nothing more.'

And she, Wanda von Szalras, had been the dupe of that inimitable mimicry and mockery!

The thought was like a rusted iron, eating deeper and deeper into her heart each day. When her consciousness, her memory, would have said otherwise, would have told her that in much he was loyal and sincere, though in one great thing he had been false, she would not trust herself to hearken to the suggestion. 'Let me see clearly, though I die of what I see!' she said in her soul. She would be blind no more. She hated herself that she had been ever blind.

She had been always his dupe, from the first sonorous phrases she had heard him utter in the French Chamber to the last sentence with which he had left her when he went from her to

the presence of Olga Brancka. So she believed. Here she did him wrong; but how was she to tell that? To her it seemed but one long-sustained comedy, one brilliant and hateful imposture.

Sometimes his cry to her rang in her ears: 'Believe at least that I did love you!' and some subtle true instinct in her whispered to her that he had there been sincere, that in passion and devotion at least he had never been false. But she thrust the thought away; it seemed but another form of self-deception.

The dull slow evening passed as usual; it was late in summer, and the night came early. She dined in company with Mdme. Ottilie and sat with her as usual afterwards. The room seemed full of his voice, of his laughter, of the music of which he had had such mastery.

She never opened her lips to say to the Princess Ottilie: 'But for you he would have passed from my life a mere stranger, seen but once.' But the tender conscience of the Princess made her feel the bitterest reproach every time that the eyes of her niece met her own, every time that she passed the blank space in the picture gallery where once had hung the portrait of Sabran, painted in court dress by Mackart. The portrait was locked away in a dark closet that opened out from the oratory of his wife. With its emblazoned arms and marquis's coronet on the frame, it had seemed such a perpetual record of his sin that she had had it taken from the wall and shut in darkness, feeling that it could not hang in its falsehood amidst the portraits of her people. But often she opened the door of her oratory and let the light stream upon the portrait where it leaned against the closet wall. It seemed then as if he stood living before her, looking as he had looked so often at the banquets and balls of the Hofburg, when she had felt so much pride in his personal beauty, his grace of bearing, his supreme distinction.

'Who could have dreamed that it was but a perfect comedy,' she thought, 'as much a comedy as Got's or Bressant's!'

Then her conscience smote her with a sense that she did him injustice when she thought so. In all things save his one crime he had been as true a gentleman as any of the great nobles of the empire. His intelligence, his bearing, his habits, his person, were all those of a patrician of the highest culture. The fraud of his name apart, there had been nothing in him that the most fastidious aristocrats would have disowned. He had inherited the qualities of a race of princes, though he had been descended unlawfully from them. His title had been a borrowed thing, unlawfully worn; but his supreme distinction of manner, his tact, his bodily grace, that large and temperate view of men and things which marks a gentleman, these had all been inborn and natural to him. He had been no mere actor when he had moved through a throne-room by her side. Her calmer reason told her this, but her

instincts of candour and of pride made her deny that where there was one fraud there could be any truth.

She span on now at her ivory wheel because it was mere mechanical work, which left thought free. The Princess, in lieu of slumbering, looked at her ever and again. Suddenly she gathered her courage and spoke.

'Wanda, you are a Christian woman,' she said slowly and softly. 'Is it Christian never to forgive?'

Her face did not change as she turned the spinning-wheel.

'What is forgiveness?' she said coldly. 'Is it abstinence from vengeance? I have abstained.'

'It is far more than that!'

'Then I do not reach it.'

'No; you do not. That is why I presumed to ask you, is it in consonance with your tenets, with your duties?'

'I think so.'

'Then change your creed,' said the Princess.

A sombre wrath shone in her eyes as she looked up one moment.

'I have the blood in me of men who were not always Christians, but who, even when Pagan, knew what honour was. There are some things which are so vile that one must be vile oneself before one can forgive them.'

The Princess sighed.

'I am in ignorance of the nature of your wrongs; but this I know—they erred who gave you absolution at Eastertide, whilst you still bore bitterness in your soul.'

'Would I lay bare my soul and his shame now to any priest?' thought Wanda; but she repressed the answer. She said simply: 'Dear mother, believe me, I have been more merciful than many would have been.'

'You mean that you have not sought for a divorce? Nay, that is not mercy; that is decency, dignity, self-respect. When they of a great race go to the public with their wrongs they drag their escutcheon in the mud for the pleasure of the crowd. That you have not done; that is not mercy. You do but follow your instincts; you are a gentlewoman.'

A momentary impulse came over her, as she heard, to tell her companion his sin and her own shame; the woman's weakness, desiring sympathy and comprehension, assailed her for an instant. But she resisted and repressed it. The Princess Ottilie was aged and feeble. She had had no slight share in bringing about this union, which was now so cruelly broken; she had been ever proud of her penetration and devoted to his defence. To learn the truth would be a shock so terrible to her that it must needs be veiled from her for ever. Besides, his wife felt as though the relation would blister her lips were she to make it even to her oldest friend.

Had she known all, the elder woman would have been even more bitter in her hatred, even more inflexible in her sense of outrage than she herself; but she could not purchase sympathy at such a price. She chose rather to be herself condemned.

Offended, the Princess rose slowly to go to her own apartments. The tears welled painfully in her eyes.

'You were so happy, he was so devoted,' she murmured. 'Can all that have crumbled like a house of sand?'

Wanda von Szalras said bitterly:

'What did I say once, the day of my betrothal? That I leaned on a reed. The reed has withered, that is all. You see, I can stand without it.'

She conducted her aunt to her bedchamber with the usual courteous observances; then returned and sat long alone in the silent chamber.

'Forgive! what is the obligation of forgiveness?' she thought. 'It is the obligation to pardon offences, infidelity, unkindness, cruelty, but not dishonour. To forgive dishonour is to be dishonoured. So would my fathers have said.'

CHAPTER XL.

BELA that dawn was awakened by his mother standing beside his bed. She stooped and touched his curls with her lips.

'I was harsh to you yesterday, my child,' she said to him. 'I come to tell you now that you were quite right to have the thought you had. You are his son; you must not forget him.'

Bela lifted up his beautiful flushed face and his eye brilliant from sleep.

'I am glad I may remember,' he said simply; then he added, with his cheeks burning: 'When I am a man I will go and find him and bring him back.'

His mother turned away her face.

When his manhood should come and he should hear the story of his father's sin, what would he say? Would not all his soul cry out aloud and curse the impostor who had begotten him?

The eyes of Bela followed the dark form of his mother as she passed from his room.

'She is very unhappy,' he thought wistfully. 'If I could find him *now*, would it make her happy again, I wonder?'

And the chivalry that was in his blood stirred in his childish veins.

'But you said that she sent him away?' whispered Gela, when Bela got upon his brother's bed and confided his thoughts to him.

'I did think so; but I might mistake,' said Bela. 'Perhaps

he went because he was obliged, and that it is which grieves her.'

'Perhaps,' said Gela, meditatively.

'If I only knew where to go to find him I would go all over the world,' said Bela, with passion. 'I would ride Folko to the earth's very, very end to reach him.'

'You could not get over the seas so,' said Gela; 'and he may be over the seas.'

'And we have never even seen the sea!' said Bela, to whom the suggested distance seemed more terrible than he had ever imagined. 'What can we do, Gela, do you think? you are clever about everything.'

Gela was silent a moment.

'Let us pray for him with all our might,' he said solemnly; and the two little boys knelt down by the bedside in their little nightshirts and prayed together for their father.

When Bela rose his face was very troubled, but very resolute. He drew out of its sheath a small sword with a handle of gold which Egon Vàsàrhely had sent him years before. 'One must pray first,' he thought, 'but afterwards one must help oneself. God does not care for cowards.'

In the day he went out all alone and found Otto; the children were allowed to go over the home woods at their pleasure. The *jägermeister* was very dear to Bela, for he told such wondrous tales of sport and danger, and spoke with such reverent affection of his lost lord.

'Where *can* he be, Otto?' said the child now, in a low hushed voice, as they sat under the green oak boughs.

'Ah, my little Count, if only I knew!' said Otto. 'I would walk a thousand miles to him, and take him the first blackcock that shall fall to my gun this autumn.'

'You really say the truth? You do not know?' said Bela, with stern questioning eyes.

'Would I tell a lie, my little lord?' said the old hunter, reproachfully. 'Since your father drove away that cruel night none of us have set eyes on him, or ever heard a word. If her Excellency do not know, how should we?'

'I mean to find him,' said the child solemnly.

The old man sighed.

'How should you do that? Our hills are between us and all the rest of the world. Perhaps he is gone because he was tired of being here.'

'No,' said Bela, who remembered his father's farewell to him, of which he could never bring himself to speak to any living creature.

Otto was silent too: he could not tell the child what all the household believed—that his father had found too great a charm in the presence of the Countess Brancka.

The weeks and months stole on their course, which in the forest-heart of the old Archduchy seems so leisurely beside the feverish haste of the mad world. The ways of life went on unchanged; the children throve, and studied, and played, and grew apace; the health of the Princess became more delicate, and her strength more feeble; the seasons succeeded each other with monotony; no sound from the cities of men that lay beyond the ramparts of the glaciers broke the silence and the calm of Hohenszalras.

Wanda herself would not have known that one year was different to another had she not been forced to count time by the inches which it added to the stature of her offspring, and the recurrence of the days of their patron saints. They grew as fast as reeds in peaceful waters, and forced her to recognise that the years were dropping into the past. Time for her was shod with lead, and crept tamely, like a cripple upon broken ground. For the children's sake she lived; but for them she knew not why she rose to these long, colourless, lonely hours. But her corporeal life ailed nothing, whilst her spiritual life was sick unto death. Almost she could have wished for the lassitude of weakness to dull her pain; her bodily strength seemed to intensify what she suffered.

In the frosted brilliant winter time she still drove her fiery horses over the snow that was like marble, plunging into the recesses of the woods, seeing above her the ramparts, and bastions, and pinnacles of the great ice-range of the Glöckner glaciers. The intense cold, the rushing air, the whiteness as of a virgin earth, the sense of profound solitude, did her good, cooled the sense of shame that seemed burnt into her life, soothed the anguish of a love fooled, betrayed, and widowed. She felt with horror that the longer she kneeled beside the altar, the longer she prayed before the great Christ in her chapel, the more passionately she rebelled against the fate that had overtaken her. But, alone in the rarefied air, with the vastness of the mountains about her, with the cold wind pouring like spring water down a thirsty throat in its merciful coldness, with the white peaks meeting the starry skies, and the waters hushed in their shroud of ice, she gathered some kind of peace, some power of endurance: consolation neither earth nor heaven could give to her.

Of him she never heard. She could only have heard through her lawyers, and they knew nothing. Neither in Paris nor in Vienna was he seen. By a letter she received from the priest of Romaris she had learned that he was not there. She had sent one of her men of business thither with money and plans, to build on the site of the old house of the Sabrans a Maison de Dieu for the aged and sick fishermen of the coast and their widows. 'It will be a *chapelle expiatoire*,' she had thought bitterly, and she had endowed it richly, so that it should be independent of all those

who should come after her. In all the occupations entailed by this and similar projects she was as attentive as of yore to all demands made on her.

When she perused a lawyer's long preamble, or corrected an architect's estimates and drawings, she was the same woman as she had been ere her betrayer had crossed the threshold of her home. Her character had been built on lines too strong, on a base too firm, for the earthquake of calamity, the whirlwind of passion, to undo it. But in her heart there was utter shipwreck. She had given herself and all that was hers with magnificent generosity; and she had received in return betrayal and a dishonour under which day and night all the patrician in her writhed and suffered.

When in the autumn of that year Cardinal Vàsàrhely, travelling in great state from Buda Pesth, arrived at Hohenszalras—a guest whom none could deny, a judge whom none could evade—he did not spare her open interrogation, searching censure, stern rebuke.

The Lilienhöhe she had excused herself from receiving; the Kaulnitz she had also refused; others as nearly related to her had encountered the same resistance to their overtures; but Cardinal Vàsàrhely came to take up his residence at the Holy Isle, with the weight of authority and the sanctity of the Church.

He visited his niece for the sole purpose of remonstrance. When he found himself met by a respectful but firm refusal to acquaint him with the reasons for her conduct, he did not, either, spare her the stately wrath of the incensed ecclesiastic. He was a man of noble presence, and of austere if arrogant life. He spoke with all the weight of his sixty years and of his eminence in the service of the Church. His eyes were bent on her in stern scrutiny as he stood drawn up to all his great height beside her in the library.

'If your griefs against your husband,' he urged, 'are of sufficient gravity to justify you in desiring eternal separation from him, you should not lean merely upon your own strength. You should seek the support of your spiritual counsellors. Although the Holy Church has never sanctioned the concubinage which the laws of men have called by the name of divorce; yet, as you are aware, my daughter, in extreme cases the Holy Father has himself deigned to unloose an unworthy bond, to annul an unsuitable marriage. In your case, if the offences of your lord have been so grave, I make no doubt that by my intercession with His Sanctity it would be possible to dissolve a union which has become unholy.'

She met his gaze calmly and coldly.

'Your Eminence is very good to interest yourself in my sorrows,' she replied; 'but for the intercession with our Holy Father which you offer, I will not trouble you. Whatever the

offences of my husband be against me, they can concern me alone. I have summoned no one to hear them. I seek no one's judgment. As regards the power of the Supreme Pontiff to bind and loose, I would bow to it in all matters spiritual, but I cannot admit that even he can release me from an earthly tie which I voluntarily assumed.'

A rebuking wrath flashed from the eagle eyes of the great Churchman.

'I did not think that Wanda von Szalras would heretically deny the Pope his power over all souls!' he said sternly. 'Are you not aware that when the Holy Father deigns in his mercifulness to decree a marriage as null and void, it becomes so from that instant? It is as though it had never been; the union is effaced, the woman is decreed pure.'

'And the children,' she said bitterly; 'can the Holy Father efface *them*?'

The Cardinal was affronted and appalled.

'You would call in question the infallible omnipotence of the Head of the Church!' he said with horror.

'The days of miracles are past,' she said coldly. 'I shall not entreat for them to be wrought for me. I trust your Eminence will pardon me if I say that no human, nay, no heavenly, permission could legitimate adultery in my sight or in my person.'

'You merit excommunication, my daughter,' said the haughty prelate, his brow black with wrath. He saw no reason why this marriage, which had offended all her house, should not be annulled by the all-powerful verdict of the Vatican. Such cases were rare, but it would be possible to include hers amongst them. The children could be consigned to religious houses, brought up to religious lives, unknown to and unknowing of the world.

'If the man whom you chose to wed,' he continued sternly, 'has offended or outraged you so greatly, let your relatives judge him and deal with him. You were warned against the gift of your hand to a stranger with an uncertain past behind him; he had not the eminence, the repute, the character that should have been demanded in your husband. But you were inflexible in your resolve then, as you are now in your silence.'

'I know of no one living to whom I owe any account,' she said with haughty decision; 'no one to whom I was bound to lay bare my mind and heart then, or to whom I am so bound now.'

'You are so bound every time you kneel in the confessional.'

'To reveal my own sins, perchance, not his.'

'Your soul should be as an open book before your priest.'

'Your Eminence will pardon me. I bow willingly and reently to the Church in all matters spiritual, but in the rule of my own conduct I admit no guide but my conscience. My sorrows are all my own. No priest or layman shall intrude upon them.'

She spoke with peremptory and unyielding decision; the old

spirit of her race was aroused in her, which in times bygone had bearded popes and monarchs, and braved the thunders of excommunication. They had been pious sons of Rome, but yet ofttimes rebellious ones; when their honour called one way and the priests pointed the other, they had lifted their swords in the sunlight and gone whither honour bade.

The Churchman knew that power of secular revolt which had been always latent in the Szalras blood; he knew now that, armed with the weapons of the Church though he was, he might as well seek to bow the mountains down as bend her will. He took for granted that her wrongs were great enough to entitle her to freedom; he had thought that she might wed again with his nephew, who had loved her so long; their mighty fortunes would have fitly met; this hateful union with a foreigner, a sceptic, a debauchee, would have become a thing of the past, washed away into absolute non-existence;—so he had dreamed, and he found himself confronted with a woman's illogical inconsistency and obstinacy.

He was deeply incensed. He assailed her for many days with all the subtle arguments of the ecclesiastical armoury, but he made no impression. She utterly refused to tell why she had exiled her husband from her house, and she as utterly refused to take any measures to attain her own freedom. When he left her he said a word of rebuke that long lingered in her memory. 'You are rebellious and almost heretical, my daughter. You entrench yourself in your silence and your pride, which you appear to forget are heinous sins when opposed to your spiritual superiors. But this only I will remind you of: if you deny the Church the power to annul the union of which its sacrament sanctified the consummation, be at least consistent: do not absolve yourself from its duties.'

With that keen home thrust in parting he left her, giving his blessing to the kneeling household; and six white mules, always kept there in readiness for his visits, bore him away through the embrowning woods.

When he reached his palace in Buda he summoned Egon Vàsàrhely and related what had passed.

His nephew heard in silence.

'Your Eminence erred in your judgment of Wanda,' he said at length. 'She would never make her wrongs, whatever they be, public, nor seek for dissolution of her marriage. She may repent it, but she will repent it in solitude.'

'If the marriage be so sacred in her eyes,' said the angry prelate, 'let her continue to live with her husband. She has been a law to herself; she has parted from him; where is the wifely submission there? Where the sanctity of the immutable bond?'

'Perhaps some day she will bid him return,' said Vàsàrhely, whose features were very grave and pale.

'She could forget this fatal folly like a bad dream,' continued the Cardinal, unheeding. 'She could begin a new life; she could wed with you.'

'Your Eminence mistakes,' said Vàsàrhely, abruptly. 'Though that man were dead ten times over, Wanda would never wed with me—nor I with her.'

'You are both wiser than the wisdom and holier than the holiness of the Church,' said the incensed ecclesiastic, with boundless scorn. He was accustomed to bend human volition like a willow wand in his hand.

When she herself had left the terrace where she had parted from the prelate, having accompanied him there in that stately etiquette which, though she had been dying, habit would have compelled her to observe in every detail, she had turned with a sense of intolerable pain from the sunshine of the September day.

It was a pretty scene that stretched before her, the children standing bareheaded, the household hushed and kneeling still where the mighty dignitary of the Mother Church had given them his benediction; the gold embroideries and rich colours of the liveries glowing in the light; the white mules and the scarlet-clothed attendants of the Cardinal passing down the avenue of oaks, with the immediate background of the darksome yews, and, further, the flushed foliage of the forests and the shine of the snow peaks; but to her it was fraught with unendurable associations. The central figure was missing from it which for so many years had graced all pageants and conducted all ceremonies there. It was the sole time since the exile of her husband that there had been any arrival or departure at Hohenszalras.

She had been compelled to receive the Cardinal with all due state and observance, and the oppressiveness of his three days' sojourn had worn and wearied her.

'I would sooner receive five emperors than one Churchman,' she said to the Princess. 'We are far from the days of the Apostles!'

'Christ must be honoured in His Vicars,' said the Princess, coldly, and with disapprobation chill on all her features.

Wanda turned away as the white mules disappeared in a bend of the avenue, and went into the house alone, whilst the children and the household still lingered in the sunshine. She traversed the whole length of the building to reach her octagon-room, where she was certain to be alone. The interrogation and censure of her uncle had left on her a harassed sense of being somewhere at fault: not to him, nor to the Church he represented and invoked, but to her own conscience.

As she passed through one of the galleries she saw her youngest child Egon, now nearly two years old, playing with his nurse, an old, grave North German woman. They were the only living

beings of the house who had not been upon the terraces to receive the Cardinal's last blessing; the one too young, the other too old to care. The child, with his fair face and his light curls, was like the child Christ of Carlo Dolce, yet there was the same resemblance in him to his father which pierced her soul whenever she looked in the faces of her other offspring.

She paused and stooped towards him now, where he played with a toy lamb in the breadth of sunlight that fell warm and broad through the open lattices of an oriel window, in the embrasure of which his attendant was sitting. The baby looked up under his long dark lashes, and made a little timid movement towards his nurse.

'Is he afraid of me?' said Wanda, with the same vague sense of remorse which she had felt before his eldest brother.

'Oh no! he is not afraid, my lady,' said the old woman with him, hurriedly. 'But he sees you so rarely now, and when they are so young they are frightened at grave faces.'

The nurse stopped herself, fearing she had said too much; but her mistress listened without anger and with a sharp pang of self-reproach.

'Come for him to my room when I ring,' she said; and she stooped again and lifted the little boy in her arms.

'Are you all afraid of me, my poor children?' she murmured to him. 'Surely I have never been cruel to you?'

He did not understand; he was still frightened, but he put his arm about her throat and hid his pretty face on her shoulder with a gesture that was half terror, half confidence. She took him to her own room and soothed and caressed and amused him, till he regained his natural fearlessness and sat happy on her knee, playing with some Indian ivory toys; then he grew tired, and leaned his head against her breast, and fell asleep as prettily as a Star of Bethlehem shuts its white leaves up at sunset.

She watched him with an aching heart.

She could look on none of her children without a throb of intolerable shame. They were the symbols as they were the offspring of all her hours of love. Another woman might have forgotten all except that they were hers.

She could not.

From that day she had the younger children brought to her more often, drove them out at times, and soon regained their affection, although to them all a majesty and melancholy, as inseparable from her now as shadows from the night, made her presence inspire them with a certain awe; even Lili, the most wilful of them all, in her pretty, gay, childish vanity and naughtiness, never ventured to disobey or to weary her.

'When I am with her it is as if I were at Mass,' Lili said to her brothers. 'You know what one feels when the Host comes and the bell rings, and it is all so still, and only the Latin words——'

'It is the presence of God that we feel at Mass,' said Gela, in a hushed voice. 'And I think our mother has God with her very much. Only He makes her sad.'

'But she never does cry,' said her little daughter.

'No,' said Gela, 'I think she is too sad for that. You know when it is very, very cold the skies cannot rain. I think that it is just so cold with her.'

And Gela's own eyes filled, for he, the most thoughtful and the most quick in perception of them all, adored his mother. When he could he would sit in her presence for hours, mute and motionless, with a book on his knees, glancing at her with his meditative eyes now and then in rapt veneration.

'When Bela grows up he will wander, I dare say, and perhaps be a great soldier,' Gela thought at such times. 'But for me, I shall stay always with our mother, and read everything that is written, and do all I can for the people, and care for nothing but for her and them.'

She had not let loose in the presence of Cardinal Vàsàrhely the burning wrath which had consumed her. And yet the valedictory words of the prelate recurred to her with haunting persistency. He had said to her: 'If you refuse to be released from your marriage, do not absolve yourself from its duties.' Was it possible, she asked herself, that she still owed allegiance to one who, whilst he had embraced her, had dishonoured her?

'As well,' she thought bitterly, 'as well say that the man and woman chained and drowned together in the Noyades of Nantes were united in a holy union!'

'*Ego conjungo vos in matrimonium, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*'

As she remembered those words of the Marriage Sacrament, uttered as she had stood beside him in the midst of the incense, the colour, the pomp, the gorgeous grandeur of the Court Chapel in Vienna, she felt that they had bound on her eternal silence, perpetual constancy, even in a sense continual submission; they forbade her to disgrace him before the world; they made his shame hers, they required her to defend him so far as in her lay from the punishment with which the laws would have met his wrongdoing: but she could not bring herself to acknowledge that it demanded more. Truth could not be forced to dwell beside falsehood. Honour could not take the kiss of peace from dishonour.

The natural veneration she bore to the speaker added to the weight of the reproach implied in the Cardinal's words. Even beyond her pride was her intense sense of the obligations of duty. She asked herself a thousand times a week if she had indeed failed in these. Honour was a yet higher thing than duty. Offended honour had its title to any choice. Her race had never gone to others with their wrongs; they had known how to avenge themselves by their own hand, in their own way. If she

had chosen to stab him in the throat which had lied to her she would not, she thought, have gone outside her right. Yet she had been merciful to him; she had neither exposed nor chastised him; she had simply cut his life adrift from hers, which he had outraged.

No man's repute is hurt by separation from his wife; he was in no worse circumstance than he had been ere he had met her; she did not withdraw her gifts. She had given a noble name to one nameless; she had granted a feudal title to a bastard; she had enriched a man who previously had owned nothing, save half a million of francs won at play and a strip of sea-shore that was stolen. She withdrew none of her gifts; she left the impostor to the full enjoyment of the world; she did not even move a step to secure the world's sympathy with herself. All she had done as her just vengeance was to withdraw herself from the pollution of his touch, and to exile him from the home of her fathers. Who could have done less? His children would in the future possess all she had, though through him they destroyed the purity of her race for ever: centuries would not wash out in her sight the stain that was in their blood: but she did not disinherit them. She could not see that she had failed anywhere in her duty; she had been more generous in her judgment than many could have been. Wherever women spoke of her and of her separation from her husband, there would they surely, with many a bitter word, repay her all the affronts which she had put upon them by her indifference and by what they had esteemed her arrogance. She knew that in such a position as she had perforce created, unexplained, the man is easily and constantly absolved of blame, the woman is always and certainly condemned. Therefore she had never doubted that the future would lie lightly on his shoulders, passed in sensual idleness, in oblivion more or less easily attained. Could it be possible that though she had been so cruelly betrayed her own obligations remained the same? Had her marriage vows compelled her to endure even such offence as this without alteration in her own obedience? Was she inconsistent in sending her betrayer from her, whilst she still considered her bond to him binding? Since she refused to take advantage of the release that the Law and the Church would give her, was it unjustifiable to free herself from his hourly presence, his daily contact? No! she could not believe that it was so.

On her name-day, in the following spring, addressing his felicitations to her, Egon Vàsàrhely added words which had cost him much to write.

'You know how dear, more dear than any earthly thing, you have been ever to me,' he wrote, 'therefore you will pardon me what I am about to say. If I had followed my own selfish desires I should have entreated you to disgrace him publicly, begged you to shake off publicly all bonds to a traitor; and I

should have shot him dead, with or without the formula of a quarrel; he himself knew that well. But for your own sake I would say to you now, pardon him if you can. Though you are the possessor of a position and of a character rare amongst women, yet even you must suffer as a separated wife. The children as they grow older will suffer from it likewise. You could divorce your husband; the Law and the Church would set you free from a union contracted in ignorance with a man guilty of a fraud. You would be free, and he would endure his fit chastisement. But I understand why you refuse to do that. I comprehend your feeling. Publicity would to you intensify disgrace. Divorce could do nothing to heal your cruel wounds. Therefore I urge on you forgiveness. It has cost me many months' bitter struggle to be able to write this to you. His offence is vile. His past is hateful. He himself merits nothing. But for your commands I would have set my heel on his throat as on a snake's. But there may have been excuses even for him; and since you acknowledge him as your husband you will, in the end, be more at peace if you do not continue to insist on a separation which will be food for the world's calumny. Besides, though you know it not, you have not exiled him from your heart, though you have sent him from your house. If you had not still loved him you would have said to me—Slay him. I believe that he loved you, though he had such foul guilt against you, and he must have some true qualities of character and mind since he satisfied yours for many long years. Of where he may be now I know not. Since I saw you I have not quitted my own country. But I would say to you—wherever he be, send for him. You will understand without words what it costs me to say to you—Since you will not accept the freedom of the Law, summon him to you and cleanse his soul in yours. I speak for you, not him. If I saw him lying dead like a dog in a ditch, for myself, I should thank God. Sometimes I look with stupor at my sword. Can it lie idle there and you be unavenged?'

The letter touched her profoundly. She realised the grandeur of generosity, the force of compelling duty, which had enabled Vàsàrhely to write it, proudest of gentlemen as he was, most devoted of lovers as he had been.

She replied to him:

'I have thought myself strong, but of late years I have found that there are things beyond my strength; what you counsel is one of them. Religion enjoins, indeed, forgiveness without limit; but there are wrongs for which religion makes no provision, and of which it has no comprehension. Nevertheless, I thank you for him and for myself.'

Any crime, any folly, any violence or faithlessness, which yet should have left his honour pure, she thought it would have been possible to condone; the life of a woman who loves must ever be

one long pardon. But such shame as this of his ate into her very soul, as rust into the pure metal. It was such shame that when her heart went out to what she had once loved in the yearning of affection, she felt herself disgraced, feeling that the dominion of the senses, the weakness of remembered and desired joys made her oblivious of indignity, feeble as an enamoured fool.

Her friends, her priests, even her own conscience might say to her 'Forgive,' but she could not bend her will to do it. Forgiveness would mean reconciliation, union, life spent together as in their days of love. She could not bring herself to endure that perpetual contact, that incessant communion. To her sight he was stained with a moral leprosy. She could not consent to admit that one in spiritual health, and clean of guilt, must dwell with one spiritually diseased.

CHAPTER XLI.

ANOTHER year passed by, and of him she still heard nothing. As, once before, his silence had told her of his passion more eloquently than speech could have done, so now the same silence tended to soften her wrath, to soothe her horror. She had expected him to take one of two courses: either to assail her with written entreaties for pardon, and ceaseless efforts to palliate his crime in her sight, or to go out into the world of men to seek oblivion in pleasure, and perhaps absolution in ambition.

He had done neither.

Once she, having occasion to go to the room which had been set aside for the boys' studies, saw the old professor absorbed in the perusal of a letter. Confused and startled he slipped it hurriedly beneath a Latin exercise of Bela's, which lay with other papers on the table. The children were out riding.

His mistress looked at him, and her face grew a shade paler still.

'You correspond with my husband?' she said abruptly, pausing, as she always paused, before she said the latter words.

Greswold flushed consciously, stammered a few unintelligible words, and was silent.

'You hear from him?' she continued with correct inference. 'You know where he is?'

'I have promised that I will not say. I pray your Excellency to pardon me,' murmured the old man, the colour mounting upward to his grey locks.

She was silent a moment; she knew not what emotion moved

her, whether wrath, or wonder, or offence; or whether even relief from long suspense.

'Do not be angered, my lady,' pleaded Greswold, timidly. 'It is the only way in which he can hear of you and of his children. Could your Excellency believe that all these months, these years, he lived on without any tidings?'

'I think you have exceeded your duty,' she said coldly. 'I think that you should have asked my permission.'

The old man stood penitent, like a chidden child. He was afraid of her interrogations; but she made none.

'You will give me your word,' she pursued, 'never to speak of this correspondence to Herr Bela or to any of the children.'

Greswold bowed his assent. 'My lord has forbidden me also,' he said eagerly.

Her brows contracted.

'You have committed an imprudence,' she said, in a tone which chilled the old man to the marrow. 'Be heedful that no one knows of it.'

She said no more; took the volume she had needed, and quitted the room.

'Who shall tell the heart of a woman?' thought Greswold, left to himself. 'She knows not whether the man she once adored be living or dead, and she does not put to me one single question, does not even seek to learn where he dwells or what he does! What could his sin be to sweep all love away as fire makes a desert of a smiling meadow? And be it what it would, of what use is human love if it have not enough of the divine love in it to rejoice over the sinner who repents?'

He knew not that the sin she might, she would, have forgiven, but that the shame ate into the fair marble of her honour like a corroding acid.

From that time he expected daily some fresh question, some allusion at least to the confession which she had surprised from him. But she never spoke to him again of it. If she placed a violent control upon herself, because she did not think it fitting to speak of her husband to one in her employ, or if her husband were absolutely dead to her memory and her affections, he could not tell. He only knew that by no word or sign did she appear to recall the brief conversation which had passed between them.

Although what he had done was innocent enough, the old physician, in his scrupulous sense of duty, began to have a sense of guilt. Had he any right to retain any hidden knowledge from the mistress whose roof sheltered him, and whose bread he ate?

But his loyalty to his pledged word, and to him whom the world of men still called Sabran, obliged him to be mute.

'After all,' he thought, 'if she knew it might be better, but my first duty is to keep my word.'

She never tempted him to break it. She was not callous and

hardened as he supposed. She felt a growing desire to learn where and how her husband had taken up the broken threads of his severed life. She had believed either that he would return to the unfettered existence that could be dreamed away under the cedar groves of Mexico, with the senses satisfied and the moral law set at naught, or that he would go amongst the men and women of the great world, popular, pitied, and easily consoled. She had seen that world exercise a potent fascination over him, and if it were called to pronounce against her or against him, she was well aware that he would bear away all its suffrages. He had always humoured and flattered it; she never.

He had passed from the sight of those who knew him as utterly as though he had descended to his grave. No sound or hint told her of his destiny. She still thought at times that he must have sought those flowery recesses of the West which had given his youth their shelter. It might well be that in his total ruin his instincts had urged him to return to the free barbaric life of his early manhood, where none would reproach him, none deride him, none know his secret or his sin. His correspondence with Greswold suggested a doubt to her. Perhaps remorse was with him and the weight of remembrance.

When, too harshly, she had assumed that all his love and life had been a lie, because one lie had been beneath it, she had told herself that he would find solace in those vices and pastimes which, in his earlier years, had been fatal to his ambition and to his perseverance. But since he cared to hear of his children's welfare, it might well be that their life together was nearer to his heart than she had credited. She believed that, if he had been sunk in the kind of self-indulgence she had imagined, he would have shunned all tidings, all memories, of his lost home.

Then again, with the inconsistency of all great suffering, an intense indignation possessed her that he did dare to remember, did dare to recall, that her offspring were also his. Even alone the hot flush of an ever-increasing shame came to her face when she thought that she had been for nine long years his, in the most absolute possession that woman can grant to man. Exile, severance, silence, cold and dark as the winters of the land of his birth, could not alter that. Whenever he chose to think of her she must be his in remembrance still.

Once the Princess ventured to say again to her a word which came from her heart. They were standing on the terrace watching the blush of evening glow on the virginal snows of the mountains.

'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,' she murmured. 'Wanda, mine, do never you think of those words—you who let so many suns rise and set, and find your wrath unchanged?'

'If it were *only* that!' she answered bitterly. 'It is so much else—so much else! Crimes deep as yonder water, high as yonder

hills, I could have forgiven, but—a baseness—never! Nay, there are pardons that would only be as base as what they pardoned.'

So it seemed to her.

When again and again her heart was thrilled with its old tenderness, her mind was haunted by a million memories of dead delights, she strove against herself, and trod down her temptation with the merciless self-punishment of an ascetic. It humbled and stained her in her own sight to feel that love could live within her without honour.

'Forgive me,' said the Princess, 'but it always seems to me that you—noble and generous and pure of mind as you are—yet have met ill the supreme trial, the supreme test of your life. You believed that you loved the man you wedded, but you loved your own pride more. If love be not endless forbearance, endless compassion, endless pity and sympathy, what is it but the mere fever and instincts of carnal passions? What raises it above the self-indulgence of the senses if not its sacrifice of will and its long-suffering? You have said so yourself in other days than these.'

'And what,' she thought passionately as she heard, 'what would it be but the basest indulgence of the senses to let oneself love and be beloved by what one scorned?—to stoop and kiss the lips that lied for mere sake of their sweetness?—to gather in one's arms the coward, the traitor, and persuade oneself that one forgave because one grew blind with amorous remembrance?'

'Is it well,' pursued her companion with soft solemnity, 'to let anyone who is so near to you live his own life when that life may be one of sin? You send him from you, and how can you tell into what extremes of evil or of folly despair may not drive him? A man cast forth from his home is like a ship cut loose from its anchor and rudderless. Whatever may have been his weakness, his offences, they cannot absolve you from your duty to watch over your husband's soul, to be his first and most faithful friend, to stand between him and his temptations and perils. That is the nobler side of marriage. When the light of love is faded, and its joys are over, its duties and its mercies remain. Because one of the twain has failed in these the other is not acquitted of obligation. Pardon me if I seem to censure. Look in your own heart and judge if I err.'

'You do not know! You do not know! If I forgave him I should never forgive myself!'

She turned her head from the roseate and happy light that spoke to her of other days, and went with a swift uneven step into the house, now darkened by the passing of the day.

She flung his memory from her as so much unholiness. Had passion not yet lived in her, the coldness of unforgiving sorrow might not have seemed to her so sovereign a duty.

Some weeks after she had seen the letter in Greswold's hands a

small hamlet was burnt down during a high north wind. It belonged to her. Hearing of the calamity she went thither at once. It was some two and a half German miles from the castle. She drove, herself, four young Hungarian horses, whose fretting graces and tempestuous gallop gave her the only pleasure which she was now capable of enjoying. They were harnessed to a carriage light and strong, built on purpose to scour rapidly rough forest roads and steep hill-sides. When she had visited the melancholy scene, given what consolation she could, and distributed money to the homeless peasants, promising to rebuild the houses with her own timber and shingles—for the conflagration had been the fault of no one, but of the wild wind which had scattered the burning embers of a hearth-fire on a neighbouring wood-stack—her horses were rested, and she began her homeward drive as the pale afternoon grew grey and the twilight fell on the little grassy vale, now charred and smoking with the smouldering ruins of the châlets.

'Our Countess never leaves us alone in any trouble,' said the women gathered about the stone statue of S. Florian, their most trusted patron, who, despite their prayers, had refused to save them from the flames. The hamlet was not far from the Maurer glaciers, and was shut in by a complete wall of mountains; it was green, fresh, beautifully cool in summer. Now, in the late spring, it was still dreary, and patches of snow still lay on its sward; it was set high on the mountain side, and dense forests sloped down from it, seldom traversed, and dark early in the afternoon. Her groom lit the lamps of her carriage as she entered the deep woods, through which the road was little more than a timber track. The long gallops and the steep inclines coming thither had calmed and pacified her young horses. They gave her no trouble to control them, as they trotted rapidly along the shadowy forest ways. In other parts of the country the sun had not then set, but here the gloom was grey, like that of a cloudy dawn. Yet it was not so dark but that she perceived ahead of her, as her horses turned a curve in the moss-grown path, a figure, whose height and outline made her heart stand still. As the animals went past him in their swinging trot the blaze of the lamps fell full upon him. He turned and retreated quickly into the undergrowth beneath the drooping boughs of the Siberian pines, but she saw him, he saw her. Mechanically he uncovered his head and bowed low; she drove onward with a sense of suffocation at her throat and a chill like ice in her veins. She had recognised him in that moment of time. He was changed, aged, and there were threads of grey in his hair. He wore a forester's dress and had a gun on his shoulder.

Where they had met, in these woods that lay under the snow saddle of the Reggen Thörl, it was still twenty English miles away from the burg. It was late when she reached home, but her people were used to those long night drives, and even the Princess had

become resigned to them. On the plea of fatigue she went to her own rooms and there remained. A faintness and sense of confusion stayed with her. She had not thought that merely meeting him thus would affect her. She had underrated the power of the past.

When she had deemed him far away in other countries he was there in her own lands, not twenty miles from her. The knowledge of his vicinity moved her with a mingled sense of unendurable pain, partial anger, reviving love. It seemed horrible to have passed him by as any stranger would have passed, without a sign or word. Yet he was dead to her, whether oceans were between them or only a few leagues of hill and grass and forest.

She did not sleep, she did not even lie down that night. He seemed always before her; in the stillness of her chamber she heard his voice, and she started up thinking he touched her.

He had looked aged, ill, weary, unhappy; the sight of him bore conviction to her that he, like herself, found no compensation, no consolation. Perchance her monitress had been right; she had been cruel. Perchance, whatever sin his present or his future life might hold would lie, directly indeed at his own door, but indirectly at hers. She had always held that high and spiritual view of marriage which, rising above mere sensual indulgence, regarded the bond of souls as sacred, and made the life on earth mere passage and preparation for eternity. She had loved to believe that she ennobled, purified, exalted his life by union with hers. Was she now false to her own creed when she left him alone, unfriended, unpardoned, to drift to any solace in vice, or any distraction in evil, which might be his fate? The sensitiveness and apprehension of her conscience before the possibility of a neglected duty made of her meditations a very martyrdom. All her life long she had been resolute and serene in action, deciding quickly, and carrying resolve into action without hesitation; but here, in the supreme crisis of her fate, she was irresolute and wrung by continual doubt. Had it only been any other crime than this!—this which cankered all the honour of her race, and was rank with the abhorred putridity of fraud!

The spring passed into summer, and the children played amidst masses of roses and sweet ranks of lilies, stretching down the green grass alleys of the gardens. More than once she went to the same hamlet, where now châlets were arising, made of pine and elm, cut in the past winter in her own woods. But of him she saw no more. She could not bend her will to ask of him of any of her household, not even of Greswold. Whether he lingered amidst her mountains, or whether he had but come thither in a momentary impulse, she knew not.

The infinite yearning of affection, which is wholly outside the instincts of the passions, awoke in her once more. She began to doubt her own reading of obligation and of duty. Had her coun-

sellors been right—had she met the supreme test of her character and had failed before it?

Was it true that a great love must be as exhaustless as the ocean in its mercy and as profound in its comprehension?

Had his sin to her released her from her duties towards him? Because he had been disloyal was she absolved from loyalty to him? Ought she sooner to have said to him,—'Nay, no crime, no untruth, no failure in yourself shall divide you from me; the darker be your soul the greater need hath it to lean on mine'?

In the violent scorn of her revolted pride, of her indignant honour, had she forgotten a lowlier yet harder duty left undone?

In her contempt and dread of yielding to mere amorous weakness had she stifled and denied the cry of pity, the cry of conscience?

> To suffer woes which hope thinks infinite,
> To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
> To defy power which seems omnipotent,
> To love, and live to hope till hope creates
> From its own wreck the thing it contemplates,
> Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent.

This, perchance, had been the higher diviner way which she had missed—this the obligation from the passion of the past which she had left unfulfilled, unaccepted.

Resolutely she had gone on upon her joyless path, not doubting that her course was right. It had seemed to her that there was no other way possible; that, stretching her hand to him across the gulf of shame that severed them, she would do nothing to raise him, but only fall herself, degraded to his likeness.

So it had always seemed to her.

Now alone the misgiving arose in her whether she had mistaken arrogance for duty; whether, cleaving so closely to the traditions of honour, she had forgotten the obligations of mercy. Had it been any other thing, any other sin, she thought, rather than this, which struck at the very root of all the trusts, of all the faiths, which she had most venerated as the legacy of her fathers!——

Sometimes it seemed to her as though, were that time of torture to be lived through again, she would not send him from her; she would say to him:

'What we love once we love for ever. Shall there be joy in heaven over those who repent, yet no forgiveness for them upon earth?'

Sometimes it seemed to her as though even now, after these years, she still ought to summon him and say this. But time passed on and passed away, and it remained unsaid.

She rode often through the same woods, now in full leaf, with sunny waters tumbling and sparkling through their flower-filled moss, but he crossed her path no more. He might have come thither, she thought, in some brief hope of possible reconciliation

to her, and then his courage might have failed him, and he might have returned to whatsoever distant climate held him, whatsoever manner of life consoled him. That he might dwell amidst the hills, unseen of men, for her sake, never once seemed to her possible. Egon Vàsàrhely might have done that; but not he—he loved the world.

The summer weighed wearily upon her. The light, the fragrance, the gaiety of nature hurt her. In winter all the earth seemed of accord with herself; it was silent, stern, solitary. The keen winds, the glittering snow, the air that was like a bath of ice, the sense of absolute isolation and seclusion which the winter brought with it were precious to her. Not even the pretty figures of the children running through the bowers of blossom and of foliage could make the summer otherwise than oppressive and mournful to her.

Sometimes she thought of how it had been on other summer nights, when he had wandered with her through the white lines of the lilies by the starlight, or sent the melodies of Schumann and of Beethoven out upon the dewy, balmy air. Then she could bear no more to look upon the moonlit gardens.

The love she had borne him stirred at those times beneath the gravestones of scorn and wrath and almost hatred which she had heaped upon it, to keep it buried far down for evermore. All the echoes of passion came to her at those moments; she despised herself because she felt that she would give her soul to feel his lips on hers again. She was ashamed that the mere sight of him could thus have moved her. Again and again she recalled noble acts, beautiful thoughts, which had been his; again and again she recalled the early hours of their love with burning cheeks and longing heart. She could have scourged herself to banish those memories, those desires. They were terrible and irresistible to her as the visions that assailed the saints of the Thebaïd. Her whole soul softened to him, yearned for him, forgave him. Then she would shrink in disdain from her own weakness, and pace her chamber like a wounded lioness.

CHAPTER XLII.

The first flush of autumn came upon the woods. Soon it would be three years since Olga Brancka had driven thither, and her work had held good and never been undone. Bela and Gela had grown tall and slender as the young fir trees; and Bela often said to his brother: 'I was ten years old on Easter Day. That is quite old. If ever I am to find him I am old enough now.'

He had not forgotten. He never forgot. Every day he wearied his little brain with thinking what he could do. Every night he

asked Heaven to help him. He had read a Bohemian ballad which had fascinated him; the story of how, in the days of chivalry, Wratislaw, the son of Berka, when but twelve years old, had made, all by himself and on foot, a pilgrimage from Prague to Tartary, to release his brother from captivity. Bela knew very well that the world had changed since then, and that if some things were easier some were harder now than then. But if Wratislaw had done so much at twelve, why should he, who was ten, not do something?

He thought himself quite old. He had a big pony, and Folko was ridden by his little brothers. He had been taught to shoot at a target and a running mark; he had become skilful at climbing with crampons and managing a boat. When he rode he had long boots that pulled up to his knees. He could drive three ponies, harnessed in the Russian way, with skill and surety. Perhaps, he thought, the Bohemian boy had not been able to do half as much as this. The ballad spoke of him as a little weakling, and yet he had found his way from Prague, in her dusky plains, to burning Tartary.

Almost he was ready to set forth on a Quixotic search without any clue to where his father dwelt, but his educated sense checked him with the remembrance that, wide as the world was, it would be of no avail to begin a harebrained pilgrimage with no fixed goal. Even Wratislaw, who was his ideal, had been certain that his brother languished in the Tartar tents before he had set his fair face to the south-east. So he remained patient in his impatience, and strove with all his might to perfect himself in all bodily exercises and manly habits, that he might be the better fitted to go on his errand whenever he should have any thread of guidance. No one guessed the resolves and the hopes which fermented like new wine in his pretty golden-haired head. His attendants thought each year that he grew gentler and more serious, and his tutors found him at once more docile and more absent-minded. But no one imagined that he was bent on any unusual enterprise.

His father had not been recognised by the groom who had accompanied his mistress in the drive through the woods of the Reggen Thörl; and no rumour of the near presence of Sabran had reached any of the household. Greswold alone knew that amidst the solitudes of the avalanche and the glacier, in the chill of the air where the eagle and the vulture alone made their home, in a life of absolute isolation, asceticism, and physical denial of every kind, the man who had sinned against her spent his exile, in such self-chosen expiation as was possible to one who had neither the faith nor the humility needful to make him seek refuge and atonement in any religious service. He dwelt in the loneliness of the ice-slopes, leading the life of a common hunter, shunning all men, accepting each monotonous and joyless day as portion of his just

punishment; in the perils of winter on the mountains doing what he could to save human or animal life; knowing no solace save such as existed for him in the sense of being near all that he had lost, and the power of watching the distant movements of his wife and children at such rare hours as he ventured to approach the hills of Hohenszalras and turn his telescope on the gardens of his lost home. A hunter or two, a guide or two of the Umbal and the Trojerthal had his confidence, but the loyalty which is the common virtue of all mountaineers made them preserve it faithfully. For the rest, in these unfrequented places, avoidance of all those who might have recognised him was easy; he was clothed like the men of the hills, and lived like them in a châlet, high perched on a ledge of rock at a great altitude in the wild and almost inaccessible region of the Hintere Umbalthörl. Of the future he never dared to think; he took each day as it came; the best he hoped for was a mountaineer's death some hour or another, amidst the clear serene blue ice, the everlasting snows.

When he had gone out from the chamber of his wife, banished and accursed, all his spirit had died in him, and nothing had seemed clear in his memory except that love which had been so insufficient to wash out his sin. The world would no doubt have welcomed him; he was not too old for its distractions and its ambitions to be still possible for him; but he had no courage left to take them up, no energy to make another future for himself. His whole life was consumed in a vain regret, as vain a desire, as vain a penitence. Had he had the faith of those men who dwelt under the willows of the Holy Isle he would have joined them. But he had no belief; he had only a futile, heart-broken, hopeless repentance, which availed him nothing and could atone for nothing.

Perhaps, he thought, if she had known that, it might have changed her. But he did not dare to approach her by any written appeal. It seemed to him as if any words from him would only appear but added falsehood, added insult. He never, even in his own thoughts, reproached her for her separation from him. He recognised that no other path was open to her. The pure daylight of her nature could find no mate in the dusk and shadow of his own; the loyalty of truth could not unite with the servitude and cowardice of falsehood. He knew it, and never rebelled against his chastisement.

Whilst still it was dawn one morning, his young son, just awaking, heard a pebble thrown at his window. He sprang out of bed, and ran and looked out. Old Otto stood below.

'My little lord,' he said softly; 'if you can come to me in the woods, when you are dressed, I have something to tell you.'

'Of him?' cried Bela.

The huntsman made a sign of assent.

The child, excited to intense emotion, hardly knew how his

servant dressed him, or how he swallowed his breakfast. After their morning meal he could always run in the woods, as he chose, before beginning his studies, and he sped as fast as his feet could bear him to the trysting-place.

'My lord, your father has been seen on the other side of Glöckner by my underling, Fritz,' said Otto, gravely; 'and I have heard, too, that the villagers have seen him in Pregratten. I made bold to tell you, Count Bela, for I had given you my word.'

Bela's whole form shook with excitement.

'I knew if he had died I should have known it!' he said, with a hushed ecstasy. 'Tell me more, tell me more, quick!'

'There is no more to tell, my little lord,' said Otto. 'Fritz will swear that he saw your father, though there was a stretch of glaciers and many fathoms of ice between them. He says there was no mistaking the way he sighted his rifle and fired. And I have heard by gossip, too, from the folks of the Hintere Umbalthörl that there can be no manner of doubt of the fact that His Excellency has dwelt there, for a time at least.'

Bela gave a deep breath.

'Then he lives, and I can find him!'

'Yes, he lives; the Lord be praised!' said Otto.

When he went to the house the boy told no one his precious secret. He studied ill, and was punished, but he did not heed it. His heart was full of joy; his brain teemed with projects.

'I will go and bring him back!' he kept saying to himself; and no force could hold his thoughts to his Homer or his Euclid.

He would tell no one, he resolved, not even Gela; and he would go alone, all alone, as the Bohemian boy had gone.

'What ails Bela to-day? He is not like himself,' said his mother to Greswold, who assured her he was well, but added that he was often careless.

The child shut his secret up in his own breast, and though he longed to tell Gela he did not. He had been tempted to confide in Otto, but resisted even that desire, knowing that Otto was stern where duty pointed, and had been always forbidden to let the little nobles wander alone to the mountains. He had his father's power of reticence, his mother's strength of self-control.

He knew what hill work was like. The elder boys often went climbing, with their guides, on fine days from May to September, and had a little tent which was set up for them at a fair altitude, whence Greswold taught them to take observations and measurements. But the mountaineering for the season was now over; it was now S. Michael's Day, and avalanches fell and snow-storms had begun on the higher slopes. He knew that if anyone saw him he would be stopped and taken back. For that reason he said nothing to Gela, who could never be persuaded to a disobedience;

and he rose in the dark, before the hour at which his attendant came to dress him, got his clothes on as best he could, slipped the sword Vàsàrhely had given him in his belt, and took his crampons and alpenstock in his hand.

He had kneeled and said his prayers, fervently though quickly.

'A soldier cannot pray *very* long if he hear the trumpets sounding,' he had thought, as he rose. He felt neither irresolution nor fear; he was strong with ardour and an exalted sense of right-doing.

He had the little knapsack which, in the long forest walks with his tutor, he was used to carry packed with simple food for a morning meal when they halted under the pines. He had put some bread and cakes into this overnight, and he had filled his little silver flask with milk, as he had seen the flasks of the gentlemen filled with wine in those grand days when the Kaiser and the Court had hunted with his father. Thus equipped he managed to escape from the house by a side door, left open by some of the under-servants, who had just risen. He knew the quick way to reach the Glöckner slopes, for he had been taken there by Otto to learn mountaineering, and for his age he climbed well. His eye was sure, his step firm, and he knew not fear. He never thought of the misery his absence might cause; he was absorbed in his self-imposed mission.

'I will bring him back,' he thought, 'and then she will smile again.'

He had been trained in the lore of the high hills too well not to know that it would take him several days to reach the Hintere Umbalthörl; but he said to himself that this must be as it would. He would climb on and on, sleep in any hut he could, and find what food he might. The Bohemian boy had crossed many mountains and seas and deserts before he had ransomed his brother.

It was a fine morning, with light pleasant winds. There was a clear blue in the sky, though north-east there was a brown haze, such as hunters fear, upon the hills.

'It will rain or snow to-morrow,' thought Bela, who had been made wise in the signs of the weather. But even that prevision did not deter him; he had his liberty and he meant to use it. He had been well trained to all bodily exercises, and he could walk long and fast without fatigue. His slender fair limbs were as strong as steel, and his health was perfect. He knew all the tracks of the home-lying woods, and he wanted no one to guide him. He got, with promptitude and address, out of sight of the terraces and towers of Hohenszalras, and soon entered what was called the Schwarzenwald, a dense pine-wood ascending abruptly the mountain side from the gardens; the only place where the wildness of the hills came in unbroken contact and close proximity to the lawns and flowers of the south side of the schloss, the lower

spurs of the Gross Glöckner descending there so steep and stern that they enclosed the parterres with a gigantic rampart of granite.

The contrast of the rose gardens with these huge overhanging heights had always so pleased the tastes of the Szalras châtelaines, that they had never allowed any attempts to be made to change or modify the savage grandeur and sombre wilds of the black wood.

He was already a trained pedestrian, and he covered five miles without pausing to breathe himself. Then he thought he had come far enough to make it safe to pause and eat. He drank his milk and opened his knapsack. There was turf still about him, and a few trees, but he had come into the rocky region. Huge walls of red and grey marbles leaned over him; white limestone crags faced him. Precipices, black with pines and firs, shelved downward. He was still on his mother's land, but in a part unknown to him.

Once rested, he climbed up manfully, straining his little velvet breeches and soaking his silver-buckled shoes in the wet moss as he went, for in the Schwarzenwald regular paths soon ceased. There was the barest track visible, made by sheep, and pushing its upward way under branches, over boulders, and through wimpling burns. It was the loneliest part of all the woods and hills; descending as it did to the rose gardens of the burg, the hunters and shepherds seldom passed through it. Steep and solitary, crowned with bare rocks, and leading only to the glacier slopes, few steps ever went over its short grass save those of woodland animals and of shepherds' flocks. At this time of the year even the latter were not near. They had been already brought down to their stables from the green stretches of pasture between the rocks. Bela met no one; not even one of his own peasantry.

He climbed and climbed uninterrupted, at first enjoying his solitude rapturously, his triumph boisterously, and then going on more solemnly, being a little awed by the sense of utter silence round him, in which no sound was heard except of rippling water, of blowing boughs, and afar off some faint tinkle of a church bell from a distant hamlet.

His spirits were exalted and full of enthusiasm. Joined to his boldness and ardour he had the German love of the mystical and marvellous. All the vast white range of the Glöckner to him was as a fairyland, opening on enchanted empires all his own. All the forenoon he was happy.

His brain was busy with many pictures as he went. He saw his search successful and his father found; he saw his happy return, and the crowd of the glad household which would flock to meet his steps; he thought how he would kneel down at her feet, and never rise until his prayer should be heard, and his mother smile again; he thought how he would cry out to her, 'Oh, mother, mother! I have brought him home!' and how she would look, and the light and the warmth come back into her face. It

was so little to do—only to climb amidst these kindly familiar mountains that had been always above him and around him since first his eyes had opened. Wratislaw had gone over lands, and seas, and deserts, and braved the jaws of lions, and the steel of foemen, and the dragon's breath of the hot sand wind; he himself had so little to do; only to climb some rough uneven ground, some green steep pastures, some smooth fields of ice. He felt sad to think it was such a little thing.

Far down below he could hear the great bells of the burg chiming and clanging, and he knew that they were giving the alarm for him; he saw men small as mice grouping together here, and running apart there; he knew they were coming out to search for him. He resolved to be very wary. He had got so long a start that he was high on the hills ere he heard the alarm-bells ring. He knew that he must avoid being seen by anyone he met, or, known as he was to the whole country-side, his liberty would soon be at an end. But the huts of the cattle-keepers were empty, and the chances of meeting a mountaineer were few. Hundreds of men might come upward in search of him, and yet miss him amidst those endless walls of stone, those innumerable peaks and paths and precipices, each one the fellow of the other.

He climbed the grassy slopes, the steep stone ways, as he had learned to do with Otto, and though he was still far from the sides of Glöckner he was yet soon on very high ground. A great mountain, green at the base, snow-covered half the way down, frowned above him; it was but one of the spurs of the Glöckner-wand, but he believed it to be the king of the Austrian Alps itself. He met no one; the mountains were solitary; the first breath of autumn had scared the cattle-keepers downward with their flocks and herds. Sometimes, very far off, he saw a lonely figure, a pedlar, or a hunter, or a shepherd, or some *alm* still tenanted by its flock, but they were mere specks on the immensity of the glacier slopes and the domes of snow. The solitude enchanted him at first; he had never been alone before. He drank from a stream, ate more bread, and held on firmly and fearlessly. The thought that his father was there beyond him, amidst those dazzling peaks, those lowering clouds, seemed to shoe his little feet with fire. He felt weaker, for his bread had nourished him but little, and he had not found a hut of any kind as he had expected to do. But he toiled on, the slope of the same mountain always facing him, always seeming to recede and to grow higher and higher the further and further he went.

The wall of granite which he was on, nine miles or more above and beyond his home, was known as the Adler Spitze. He had been near it in other days, but he did not recognise it now; all these stern slopes and steeps, all these domes and roof-like ridges of snow and ice, so resemble each other that a longer apprenticeship to the hills than his had been is needed to distinguish them one from another. The Adler Spitze was a danger-

ous and seldom traversed peak; its sides were bristling with jagged rocks, and its chasms were many and deep. More than one death had been caused by it in late years, and near its summit his mother had caused to be erected a refuge, one of the highest of the district, where a keeper was for ever on the watch for belated travellers. These were, however, very few, for the mountain had gained a bad name amongst the hunters and pedlars and muleteers who alone traversed these hills, and was left almost entirely to the birds of prey, which were numerous there and had given it its name.

When the pine-woods ceased, and there was only around him mere naked rock, with a little moss growing on it here and there, Bela knew that he had come very high indeed. And he had his wish: he was quite alone. There was nothing to be seen here except the dusky forest, shelving downward, and vast slopes of naked grey stone, with large loose rocks scattered over them, as if giants had been playing there at pitch-and-toss. There was too much mist in the north and west, which faced him, for the opposite mountains to be seen, for it was still early in the day. He did not now feel the joy and excitement he had expected. He had climbed to the glacier region indeed, but the scene around was dreary, and the vast expanse of vapour surrounding him looked chill and melancholy.

In the excitement and exultation of his thoughts he had forgotten many things which he knew very well, trained to the hills as he was; he had forgotten that it might rain or snow before he reached any halting-place, that fogs came on at that season with fatal suddenness, that if the sun were obscured the cold would soon become great, that if a mist came down he would be unable to find any road, and that men had been often killed on those heights who had known every inch of the hills.

Something of his buoyancy and certainty of success began to pale and grow dull as the isolation lost its sense of novelty, and that intense silence of the glacier world, which is at all times so solemn, began to strike awe into his intrepid soul. He had often been as high, but there had been always on his ear his brother's voice, and his guide's laugh, and the merry sounds of the men chattering together as they climbed. Now there was no sound anywhere, save now and then a splitting cracking noise, which he knew was ice giving way under the noon-day heat of the sun. 'It must be just as still as this in the grave,' he thought, with a chill in his warm eager leaping young blood. A little tuft of edelweiss growing in a crevice, and an *alpenlerche* winging its way through the blue air, seemed to him like friends.

He wished now that Gela were with him.

'But it would have been of no use to ask him,' he thought sadly. 'He never will disobey, even to make good come of it.'

A white mist had settled over all the lower world, one of the autumn fogs which come from the lower clouds enwrapped all the

lakes and pastures and forests of Hohenszalras. Nothing could better baffle and distract his pursuers; perplexed and blinded, they would be wholly at a loss to trace his steps. It did not occur to him that the fog on the lower lands might mean also storm and snow, and the darkness and dampness of ice-cold vapours, in the upper air where he was.

It had become rough, hard, toilsome work; he was bruised, and almost lame, and very tired. But the spirit in him was not crushed; he kept always thinking: 'If it did not hurt, it would be nothing to do it.'

He had now got above all grass; the ground was loose shingle where it was not bare granite, limestone, or marble, on all of which it was difficult to keep a hold. There was snow not very far above him. The air here was intensely cold. He had not thought to bring any furs with him. His limbs were sorely cramped, his feet began to feel numb, his fingers were so chilled he could hardly grip his alpenstock; the hard slopes gave scarcely any footing to his climbing-irons; there were clouds about him enveloping him, freezing him in their icy mist. He began to think piteously of his brother, of his home, and of the warm-cushioned nooks by the study fire, but he would not give in; he toiled on, cutting and hurting his hands and knees as he groped on his upward way. He reminded himself of Wratislaw, of Cassabianca, and all the boy-heroes he had ever read of; he would not yield in endurance to any one of them.

But, looking up, he knew by the colour of the sky that it was about to snow; the heavens were of a leaden uniform grey, and seemed to meet and touch the mountain. Then Bela knew that in all likelihood he would never see Gela or his home again.

He choked down the sob that rose in his throat, and tried to think what he could do to save himself. The ascent was now so steep that he could make no upward way, and could barely keep himself from sliding downwards. He caught at a projecting boulder and pulled himself with great effort up on to it; there he could sit in a cramped position and take breath. When he looked down he saw no forests, no land, no rocks, nothing but a sea of fog, which had gathered thick and grey beneath him. In autumn and spring the mountain weather changes in ten minutes from fair to foul.

The odd stupor that comes from long exposure at a great altitude in cold and vapour was stealing over him. Strange noises sounded in his ears, and his feet and hands tingled. He began to fear that he should get no further on his way, and he had not listened so often to the tales told by huntsmen without knowing clearly enough the dangers which await those who are out on the mountain side in bad weather when daylight goes.

As he sat there, gazing dizzily into the ocean of vapour below him, and upward to the huge walls of granite and of snow, he saw

coming and descending towards him from out the clouds a huge dark bird; the immense wings seemed wide as heaven itself as it circled and swept the air.

Bela's heart stood still: it was a male eagle, a golden eagle, and he knew it.

The child's aching eyes watched the monarch of the upper air with a horrible fascination. It looked black as night against the steely sky, the snow-covered peaks.

He sat erect, and cried aloud to it in half delirious indignant reproof. 'Oh, you great bird! you are treacherous, you are thankless! *We* have spared you and yours always, and now you will kill me! Oh, do you not hear? The Szalras have always spared you! Do you not hear?' But the shouts of his young voice died away against the granite walls around him, and the king-bird paused not, but came nearer, and nearer.

It circled round and round, and each circle narrowed, till it was poised immediately above his head, motionless, balancing itself upon its outstretched pinions. He could see its eyes bent on him, see the giant claws drawn up against its belly, see the hooked yellow beak. The eagle was lord of the air, and he had intruded on its royalty: in another moment he felt that it would descend on him and bear him off in its talons or batter him to death with the blows of its wings. He drew his little sword and waited for it; his eyes did not shrink, his body did not cower; he looked upward with his toy-blade drawn in as true a courage as that of Leonidas.

'If only I could take him home once—once—I would not mind dying here afterwards,' he thought, in his dreamy exultation; '*Gott und mein Schwert!*' he muttered, and waited still, calmly. Yet to die with his errand undone—that seemed cruel.

The huge dark mass balanced itself one moment more, then measuring its prey rushed through the air towards him. But, ere it had seized him, a shot flashed through the shadows, and rang through the silence; the bird dropped dead in a ring of blood on the naked stone of the mountain side.

Bela sprang up, and tottering on the slippery shelving rock threw his arms outward with a loud cry.

'I came to find you!' he shouted, in his rapturous joy; then cold and fatigue and past terror conquered him. He swooned at his father's feet.

Sabran had not known that it was his son whom he saved. He had seen a child menaced by a bird of prey, and so had fired. When the boy staggered to him with that cry of welcome, he was for the moment stunned with amazement and gratitude and inexpressible emotion; the next he raised the little brave body in his arms.

'Oh! tell me where your mother kissed you last, that I may set my lips there!' he murmured to the child: but Bela heard not.

He was cold, inanimate, and senseless. He had gained his goal, but he had no sight or sense to know it. His father looked around him with terror for his sake. The snow had begun to fall, the darkness was deepening, the mists were creeping upward; he, who for three years had dwelt a mountaineer amidst these mountains, knew the danger of being belated amidst them in autumn, when, at a stroke, autumn became winter; sometimes in a single night. He himself had his dwelling far from there upon the Isel water, under the Umbal glacier. If he had to carry the boy it would be useless to dream of reaching the rude place which he had made his home: the weight of a tall child of ten years old is no light burden, and he knew that even if Bela regained his consciousness he would be incapable of exertion in the cold, which would intensify with every hour. But he wasted no moments in hesitation. He knew what the white fall of those softly-descending feathers from above, what the darkness and wetness of the dense fog down below, meant, out on the spurs of Glöckner after sunset. Lives were lost here every year; herds that had stayed on the Alps too late were surprised and destroyed by early snowstorms; pedlars and carriers were belated, and sent to a last sleep by that sudden plunge of autumn into frost. He knew his way inch by inch, and he knew that there was, some mile or so beyond him, the Wandahutte, erected in a dangerous pass by his wife, as a thanksgiving in the first months of their marriage. There he would find a rude bed, food, wine, and shelter for the night. He set himself to reach it.

It was hard to climb with the child, held by one arm, and thrown across one shoulder, as shepherds throw a disabled lamb. His other hand gripped his alpenstock; he had left his rifle under a ledge of rock, as a useless load. He had stripped off the hunter's jacket that he wore, and wrapped it round Bela, whose body and limbs felt frozen. Down below in the valleys fruit trees had still their plums and pears, and asters and dahlias still flowered, but at this elevation the cold was piercing and the snow froze as it fell.

A high wind also had risen, as the day declined, and blew the white powder of the snow in whirling clouds: the terrible *tourmente* of the Alps which every traveller dreads. In the confusion of it he knew that he might walk round and round on the same road all night, making no progress. Soon it grew dark, though not quite four o'clock. He had no light with him, for he had not intended to be out at night; he had but come thither, as he often came, to see the distant gleam of the Szalrassee, the far-off outline of the Hohenszalrasburg. He had been reascending and returning when he had seen a child menaced by an eagle, and had fired. Had he been by himself he would have found the hut speedily, but weighted with the burden of Bela's inert body he made little way, and staggered often on the slippery frozen steep. He had no

hands free to wield his hatchet and cut his way by steps over the ice which had formed in all the fissures of the rocks.

The mountains had been his only friends in his exile. He had returned to them, he had dwelt amongst them, he had borne his sorrows through their help, and strengthened himself with their strength. But they menaced him sorely now. For himself he cared not, but his heart ached for the child, whose courage and affection had brought him thither to meet his death.

'My poor Bela!' he murmured, as the boy's fair head hung over his shoulder, 'why did you come to me? I give you nothing but evil. Safety, comfort, happiness, honour, all come from *her*?'

The whole heavens seemed to open, so dense a storm of snow now poured upon him. There were strange deep noises ever and again, as from the very bowels of the hills; a thousand times had he rejoiced to match his strength against the mountains and to conquer, but now they were his masters. All around him were the bastions and walls and domes of the great ice peaks; the huge glaciers hung above like frozen seas suspended; he could not behold them but he felt their presence and their awe.

'The snow is in my blood and my blood is yours, and now it claims us,' he muttered to the senseless ear of the child. He and the child had loved the snow, met it with welcome, sported with it in triumph; and now it killed them. They would lie down in it, and be one with it for ever.

But although these fancies drifted in his brain, he strove with all his might to keep in movement, to ascend ever in the easterly direction of the refuge which he sought to gain. So far as he could, weighted with his burden and blinded by the darkness, he continued to climb, gripping the hard slopes with his feet and his alpenstock. He had given his coat to the child; the cold made every vein in his own body numb; his limbs pricked and seemed to swell; he had only his woollen shirt, above his linen one, and his velvet breeches between him and the frozen air, that could slay a hundred sheep massed together in their warmth and wool. He knew that the hut was but a mile, or little more, from the place where he had shot the eagle; but half a mile in the snow-storm and the darkness was longer than forty miles in sunshine and fair weather. He could not be even sure that he went aright; he could see nothing; the sky was covered with the low dense clouds; he could only guess. All the slender signs and landmarks, that would even in mere twilight have served to guide his steps, were now hidden. A thick woolly impenetrable gloom enshrouded him; he felt as though he were muffled and suffocated by it, and the fatal drowsiness—the fatal desire to lie down and be at rest—with which frost kills, stole on him.

With all the manhood in him he resisted it for the child's sake.

He had been climbing and wandering three short hours only,

and he had believed that it was midnight at the least. Bela still hung like a lifeless thing over his shoulder, but he felt that his limbs were warmer, and his heart beat feebly, but with regularity.

'God grant me power to save him, for his mother's sake,' thought Sabran; 'then there may come what will.'

He struggled anew against the mortal sleepiness, the increasing numbness, that grew upon himself. Suddenly, as he turned, without knowing it, the corner of a wall of rock he saw a starry light. He knew that it was the lamp of the refuge which, by his wife's command, was lit at twilight every evening the whole year round. It was now but a few roods off; he could see even the outline of the cabin itself, black against its background of snow. But he had taken the wrong path to it. Between him and it there yawned a wide crevasse in the glacier on which he now stood.

He shouted loud, but the wind was louder than his voice. The keeper in the refuge could not hear. He paused doubtfully. To retrace his steps and seek the right path would be certain destruction; it would take him many miles about, and there was no chance even in the darkness that he would ever find it; his strength, too, was failing him, and the child was still unconscious. There was but one way of escape, to leap the fissure. It was wider than any man could be sure to clear, and if he fell within it he would fall into jagged ice a thousand fathoms down. By daylight he had often looked down into its awful depths, blue in their darkness, set with jagged teeth of ice like a trap's jaws.

The leap might be death or life.

He hesitated a few instants, then drew quite close to the edge, and cast aside his pole, for the chasm was too wide for that to help him, and he needed both hands free to hold the boy more firmly. The lamp from the hut shed light enough to guide him; the snow fell fast, the wind was violent. He paused another moment on the brink, drew the child closer to him and clasped him with both arms; then, gathering all his force into his limbs, he leaped.

He cleared the fissure, but staggered on the slippery ice beyond. He fell heavily, but still held his son so that Bela fell uppermost and dropped upon him.

Crushed by his weight, Sabran sank at full length on the white crystal ground; alone he would have leaped as surely as the chamois.

The shock awoke Bela from his trance; he opened his blue eyes giddily.

'It is you!' he murmured feebly, as he felt himself lying on his father's breast.

'It is I!' said Sabran. 'My child, if you can move, try and creep to that hut and call. I cannot.'

The child, without a sound, trembling sorely, and with a sense

of confusion making his head dizzy, obeyed, drew himself slowly up, and dragged his tired, aching, cramped limbs over the snow.

'You are brave,' murmured his father, whose eyes followed him. 'You are your mother's son.'

Bela reached the door of the hut and beat on it with his little frozen hands, and then fell down against it.

'It is I—Count Bela!' he managed to cry aloud. 'Come to my father; quick!'

The door was flung aside, and the keepers of the hut rushed out at the first cry. They had been asleep. They were old jägers, past the work of the forests, but still strong. Having lighted the beacon without, they had drunk a little wine, and chattered, and then dosed. Terrified at their own negligence and at the sight of their lady's son, they staggered out into the night, and together they bore the body of Sabran into the refuge. He was unable to rise.

'You cannot move!' sobbed the child, raining kisses on his hands.

'I am stiff from the cold; nothing more,' said his father, faintly.

Then he looked at the men.

'One of you, if it be possible, go to the Burg. Tell the Countess von Szalras that her son is safe. You need not speak of me. Bring the physician here when it is morning; but say nothing of me to-night. Give me a little of your wine——'

His lips were blue, he felt faint; in his own heart he said to himself, 'I am hurt unto death.'

Bela had thrown his arms about him, and trembling like a leaf, clung there and sobbed aloud deliriously.

'You are hurt, you are hurt, and all for me!' he sobbed, as he saw his father placed on the truckle bed set aside for any belated wanderer on the hills.

Sabran smiled on him.

'My child, do not grieve so; it is nothing; a mere momentary wrench; do not even think of it. No, no! I am not in pain.'

The wine revived him, and restored his strength, and he sought to conceal his injury for the boy's sake.

'Warm some of this wine and give it to my son,' he said to the keeper of the hut; 'then undress him, wrap him warmly, and make him sleep before the fire.'

'You are hurt, you are ill!' moaned Bela. 'I came to find you to take you back. Our mother has never been the same;—she has never smiled——'

'Hush!' said Sabran, almost sternly. 'Do not speak of your mother before these men, her servants. You came to seek me, my poor little boy? That was good of you, and it was good to remember me. It is three years——'

Bela clung to him and put his lips to his father's ear, that the men might not hear.

'The others have always prayed for you,' he murmured, 'because we were all told. But me, I have loved you always. I have never thought of anything else. And I have tried to be good, oh! I *have* tried!'

A great suffering came on his father's face as he heard the innocent words, and a great tenderness.

'When I am dead, as I shall be so soon, will he remember, too?' he thought.

Aloud he said:

'My child, it is very sweet to me to hear your voice again. But if you love me now, obey me. You will have fever and ague if you do not drink some warm wine, let yourself be undressed, and lie down before the fire. Do not be afraid. You will see me when you awake. I shall not stir.'

He thought as he spoke:

'No, I shall never stir again; they will bear me away to my grave, that is all. I am like a felled tree. All is over. Well, perchance, so best: when I am dead she may forgive—she may love the children.'

When at last Bela, sobbing piteously, had reluctantly obeyed, and when, despite all his struggles, nature, frozen, weary, and worn out, compelled him to close his eager eyes in heavy dreamless slumber, Sabran with a glance called the keeper to him.

'Now the child sleeps,' he said, 'get my clothes off me if you can. Touch me gently. I think my back is broken.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

It was twelve o'clock in the night. Wanda von Szalras paced the Rittersaal with feverish steps and limbs which, whilst they quivered with fear, knew no fatigue. It had been nine in the morning when Greswold and the servants, having searched in vain, came at last to her with the tidings that her first-born son was lost; his bed empty, his clothes gone, his little sword away from its place. All the day she had sought herself, and organised the search of others with all the energy and courage of her race. She had not given way to the despair which had seized her, but in her own soul she had said: 'Does fate chastise me thus for my own cruelty? I have shrunk from their sweet faces because they were like his. For two long months I exiled them, I thrust them from my presence and my heart. I have been ashamed of them. Does God punish me through them? Shall I lose my children, too? Can I forgive myself? Have I not even wished them unborn? Oh, my Bela, my darling, my first-born! Yes, you are his, but more than all, you are mine!'

When night closed in, and all the many separate search-parties returned, bringing no news of him, she thought that she would lose her reason. All had been done that could be done; the men on the estates were scattered far and wide. It was known that there were snow-storms on the heights; the white fury had even at eventide descended to the lower ground, and the terraces and gardens shone white as the lights of the heavens fell upon them. Every now and then there came the report of a gun on the hills; the men were firing in hope that the child, if lost, might hear the shots. The evening passed on and midnight came, and no one knew where Bela was in those vast forests, those immense hills, all hidden in the impenetrable darkness. She saw him at every moment lying white and cold in some hollow in the snow; she saw the cruel winds blow his curls, his fair limbs stiffen. Every year the winter and the mountains took their toll of lives.

She had known nothing of the purport of the child's disappearance; she had been left to every vague conjecture with which her mind could torture her. The whole household and all the woodsmen and huntsmen had scoured the hills far and wide, and the whole day and night had gone by with no tidings, no result. Sleep had visited no eyes at Hohenszalras; from its terraces the snow-storm and hurricanes beating around the head of Glöckner were discernible by the agitation of the clouds that hid one-half the heights.

Gela had stayed up beside her, his little pale face pressed to the window frame, his terrified eyes staring into the gloom which near at hand grew red with the beacon fires.

As midnight tolled from the clock tower he came to her, and touched her hand.

'Mother,' he whispered, 'I dared not say it before, but I must say it now. I think—I think—Bela is gone to try and bring *him* home.'

'Him!' she echoed, while a thrill ran like fire and ice together through her, from head to foot. 'You mean—your father?'

'Yes.'

She was silent. Her breast heaved.

'What makes you say that?' she asked, at last.

'Bela thought of nothing else all this year and last year, too,' said Gela, in a hushed voice. 'He was always talking of it. When he was smaller he thought of riding all over the world. Yesterday he was so strange, and when we went to bed he kissed me ever so many times; and he prayed a long, long while. And for nothing less would he have taken the sword, I think. And—and I heard the men saying to-day that our father was somewhere near; and I think that Bela might have heard that, and so have gone to bring him home.'

'To bring him home!'

The words, uttered in his son's soft, grave, flute-like voice, pierced her heart. She could not speak.

'Will he rob me even of my first-born?' she thought, bitterly.

At that moment Greswold entered. Gela, looking in his face, gave a shout of joy.

'You have found my Bela!' he cried, flinging his arms about the old man.

'Yes, your brother is safe, quite safe! My Lady hears?'

She heard, and the first tears that she had ever shed for years rushed to her eyes. She drew Gela, with a passionate gesture, to her side, and falling on her knees beside the Imperial throne in the Rittersaal, praised God.

Then, when she rose, she cried in very ecstasy:

'Fetch him; bring him at once!—oh, my child! Who found him? Who has him now? If a peasant saved his life, he and his shall have the finest of all my land in Iselthal in grant for ever and for ever!——'

Greswold looked at her timidly; then said:

'May I speak to your Excellency alone?'

She touched Gela's hair tenderly.

'Go, my darling, and bear the good news to our reverend mother. You know how she has suffered.'

The boy obeyed and left the hall. She turned to Greswold.

'Tell me all, now.'

The old man hesitated, then took his courage up and answered

'My Lady—his father found your son.'

She put her hand out and clenched the arm of the throne as if to save herself from falling.

'His father!' she echoed. 'How came he there? Answer me, with the truth, the whole truth.'

'My Countess,' said Greswold, while his voice shook, 'your husband has dwelt amidst the Glöckner slopes almost for the last three years. When he left here he remained absent awhile, but not long. He has lived in utter solitude. Few knew it. The few who did kept his secret. I was one of these. He had corresponded with me ever since he left your house. You may remember being angered?'

She made a gesture of assent.

'Go on,' she murmured. 'He found my child, you say?'

'He found Count Bela; yes. It seems he had come as near here as some nine miles eastward; near the hut which your Excellency built, not very long after your marriage, on the crest of the Adler Spitze, in consequence of the fatal accident to the Bavarian pedlars. He knew nothing of Count Bela's loss, but there he saw a young boy threatened by an eagle, and shot the bird. The fog was even then coming on upon the heights. He

found his son insensible from fatigue, and cold, and terror, and bore him in his arms until he reached the refuge. He had been near it all the time, but as the mist deepened and the snow fell he lost his way, and must have gone round and round on the same path for hours. We were, in sheer despair, mounting towards the Adler Spitze, though we did not believe the child could have possibly got so far, when we met one of the keepers descending with the news. The storm is at its height; we could only grope our way, and we missed it many times, so that we have been four mortal hours and more coming downward those seven miles. The keeper said that my lord desired you should hear at once of the safety of the child, but not of his own presence in the hut. But I felt that your Excellency should be told of all.'

'You were right. I thank you. You have been ever faithful to me and mine.'

She stretched out her hand to him in dismissal, and sought a refuge in her oratory.

She felt that she must be alone.

She almost forgot the safety of her first-born in the sense that his father was near her. She fell on her knees before the Christ of Andermeyer and praised heaven for her child's preservation, and with a passion of tears besought guidance in her struggle with what now seemed to her the long and cruel hardness of her heart.

To hear thus of him whom once she had adored, blinded her to all save the memories of the past, which thronged upon her. If he had repented so greatly was it not her obligation to meet his penitence with pardon? It would be bitter to her to live out her life beside one whose word she would for ever doubt, whose disloyalty had cut to the roots of the pride and purity of her race. Nevermore between them could there be the undoubting faith, the unblemished trust, which are the glorious noonday of a cloudless love. She might forgive, but never, never, she thought, would she be able to command forgetfulness.

But for that very reason, maybe, would her duty lie this way.

The knowledge of those lonely desolate years, passed so near her, whilst he kept the dignity and the humility of silence, touched all the generosity of her nature. She knew that he had suffered; she believed that, though he had betrayed her, he had loved and honoured her in honesty and truth. One lie had poisoned his life, as a rusted nail driven through an oak tree in its prime corrodes and kills it. But he had not been a liar always. She had made his life her own in bygone years: was she not bound now to redeem it, to raise it, to shelter it on her heart and in her home? Was not the very shrinking scorn she felt for his past a reason the more that she should bend her pride to union

with him? She had thought of her life ever as the poet of the flower:

> the ever sacred cup
> Of the pure lily hath between my hands,
> Felt safe unsoiled, nor lost one grain of gold.

Had there been egotism in the purity of it, self-love beneath love of honour? Had she treasured the 'grain of gold' in her hands rather with the Pharisee's arrogance of purity than with the true humility of the acolyte?

She kneeled there before the carven Christ in an anguish of doubt.

He had given her back her first-born. Should she be less generous to him?

Should she for ever arrogate the right of judgment against him, or should she stretch the palm of pardon even across that great gulf of wrong dividing them as by a bottomless pit?

Tears came like dew to her parched heart. It was the first time that she had ever wept since the night when she had exiled him. Three long barren years had drifted by; years cold and dark and joyless as the winter days which bound the earth under bands of iron, and let no living thing or creeping herb rejoice or procreate.

When she rose from her knees her mind was made up, a great peace had descended on her soul. She had forgiven her own dishonour. She had laid her heart bare before God and plucked her pride up from its bleeding roots.

All the early hours of her love recurred to her with an aching remembrance, which had lost its shame and was sweet in its very pain. His crime was still dark as the night in her eyes, but her conscience and her awakening tenderness spoke together and pleaded for her pardon.

What was love if not one long forgiveness? What raised it higher than the senses if not its infinite patience and endurance of all wrong? What was its hope of eternal life if it had not gathered strength in it enough to rise above human arrogance and human vengeance?

'Oh, my love, my love!' she cried aloud. 'We will live our lives out together!'

Her resolve was taken when she left her oratory and traversed her apartments to those of the Princess Ottilie, who met her with eager words of joy, herself tremulous and feeble after the anxious terrors of the past day. Some look on Wanda's face checked the utterance of her gladness.

'Is it not true?' she said in sudden fear. 'Is the child not found?'

'Yes; his father has found him,' she answered simply. 'Dear mother, long you have condemned me; judged me unchristian, unmerciful, harsh. I know not whether you were right, or I.

God knows, we cannot. But give me your blessing ere I go out into the night. I go to him; I will bring him here.'

The other gazed at her doubting, incredulous, touched to a great hope.

'Bring him?' she echoed, 'your child?'

'My husband.'

'You will do that?—ah! mercy is ever blessed; the grace of Heaven will be with you!'

She sighed as she raised her head.

'Who can tell? Perhaps my harshness will make heaven harsh to me.'

When she came forth again from her own rooms she was clothed in a fur-lined riding-habit.

'Bid them saddle a horse used to the hills,' she said, 'and let Otto and two other men be ready to go with me.'

'It is a fearful night,' Greswold ventured to suggest. 'It will be as bad a dawn. It snows even here. We met the keeper almost midway up the Adler Spitze, yet it took us four hours to make the descent.'

She did not even seem to hear him.

'May I follow?' he asked her humbly. She gave a sign of assent, and stood motionless and mute; her thoughts were far away.

When the horse was brought she went out into the night. The storm of the upper hills had descended to the lower; the wind was blowing icily and strong, the snow was falling fast, but on the lower lands it did not freeze as it fell, and riding was possible, though at a slow pace from the great darkness. She knew every step of the way through her own woods and up to the spurs of the Glöckner. She rode on till the ascent grew too steep for any animal; then she abandoned the horse to one of her attendants, took her alpenstock and went on her way towards the Adler Spitze on foot, the men with their lanterns lighting the ground in front of her. It was wild weather and grew wilder the nearer it grew to dawn. There was danger at every step from slippery frozen ground, from thin ice that might break over bottomless abysses. The snow was driven in her face, and the wind tore madly at her clothes. But she was used to the mountains and held on steadily, refusing the rope which Otto entreated her to take and permit him to fasten to his loins. They kept to the right paths, for their strong lights enabled them to see whither they went. Once they crept along a narrow ledge where a man could barely stand. The ascent was long and weary in the teeth of the weather; it tried even the stout jägers; but she scarcely felt the force of the wind, the chill of the black frost.

No woman but one used as she was to measure her strength with her native Alps could have lived through that night, which tried hardly even the hunters born and bred amidst the snow

summits. By day the ascent hither was difficult and dangerous after the summer months, but after nightfall the sturdiest mountaineer dreamed not of facing it. But on those heights above her in the dark yonder, beneath the clouds, were her husband and her child. That knowledge sufficed to nerve her limbs to preternatural power, and the men who followed her were loyal and devoted to her service; they would have lain down to die at her word.

When her body seemed to sink with the burden of fatigue and cold, she looked up into the blackness of the air, and thought that those she sought were there, and fancied that already she heard their voices. Then she gathered new strength and crept onward and upward, her hands and feet clinging to the bare rock, the smooth ice, as a swallow clings to a house wall.

She had issued from a battle more bitter with her own soul; and had conquered.

At last they neared the refuge built by and named from her, and set amidst the desolation of the snow-fields. She signed to her men to stay without, and walking onward alone drew near the heavy door.

She opened it a little way, paused a moment, drawing her breath with effort; then looked into the cabin. It was a mere hut of two chambers made of pitch pine, and lighted by a single window. There was no light but from the pallid day without, which had barely broken. Before the fire of burning logs was a nest of hay, and in it lay the child, sleeping a deep and healthful sleep, his hands folded on his breast, his face flushed with warmth and recovered life, his long lashes dark upon his cheeks.

His father was stretched still as a statue on the truckle-bed of the keeper who watched beside him.

The day had now broken, clear, pale, cold; the faint rose of sunrise was behind the snow peaks of the Glöckner, and an *alpenflühevogel* was trilling and tripping on the frozen ground. From a distant unseen hamlet far below there came a faint sound of morning bells.

She thrust the door further open and entered. She made a gesture to the keeper, who started up with a low obeisance, to go without. She fastened the latch upon him; then, without waking the sleeping child, went up to her husband's bed. His eyes were closed; he did not notice the opening and shutting of the door; he was still and white as the snow without; he looked weary and exhausted.

At sight of him all the great love she had once borne him sprang up in all its normal strength; her heart swelled with unspeakable emotion; she stood and gazed on him with thirsty eyes tired of their long denial.

Stirred by some vague sense of her presence near him he looked up and saw her; all his blood rushed into his face. He could not

speak. She stooped towards him and laid her hand gently upon his.

'I am come to thank you.'

Her voice trembled.

He gave a restless sigh.

'Ah! for the child's sake,' he murmured. 'You do not come for me!——'

She hesitated a moment, then she gathered all her strength and all her mercy.

'I come for you,' she answered in low clear tones. 'I will forget all else except that I once loved you.'

His face grew transfigured with a great joy.

He could not speak; he gazed at her.

'You were my lover, you are my children's father. You shall return to us,' she murmured, while her voice seemed to him heard in some dream of Heaven. 'Your sin was great, yes; but love pardons all sins, nay, effaces them, washes them out, makes them as though they were not. I know that now. What have not been my own sins?—my coldness, my harshness, my cruel unyielding pride? Nay, sometimes I have thought of late my fault was darker than your own; more hateful in God's sight.'

'Noblest of all women always!' he said faintly. 'If it be true, if it be true, stoop down and kiss me once again.'

She stooped, and touched his lips with hers.

The child slept on in his nest of hay before the burning wood. The silence of the high hills reigned around them. The light of the risen day came through the small square window of the hut. Outside the bird still sang.

He looked up in her eyes, and his own eyes smiled with celestial joy.

'I am happy!' he said simply. 'I have lived amongst your hills almost ever since that night, that I might see your shadow as you passed, hear the feet of your horses in the woods. The men were faithful; they never told. Kiss me once more. You believe, say you believe, *now*, that I did love you though I wronged you so?'

'I do believe,' she answered him. 'I think God cannot pardon me that I ever doubted!'

Then, as she saw that he still lay quite motionless, not turning towards her, though his eyes sought hers, a sudden terror smote dully at her heart.

'Are you hurt? Cannot you move?' she whispered. 'Look at me; speak to me! It is dawn already; you shall come home at once.'

He smiled.

'Nay, love, I shall not move again. My spine is hurt, not broken, I believe—but hurt beyond help; paralysis has begun. My angel, grieve not for me, I shall die happy. You love me still.

Ah! it is best thus; were I to live, my sin and shame might still torture you, still part us, but when I am dead you will forget them. You are so generous, you are so great, you will forget them. You will only remember that we were happy once, happy through many a long sweet year, and that I loved you;—loved you in all truth, though I betrayed you!'

. . . . . .

The hunters bore him gently down in the cool pale noontide along the peaceful mountain side homeward to Hohenszalras, and there, after eleven days, he died.

The white marble in its carven semblance of him lies above his grave in the Silver Chapel; but in the heart of his wife he lives for ever, and with him lives a sleepless and an eternal remorse.

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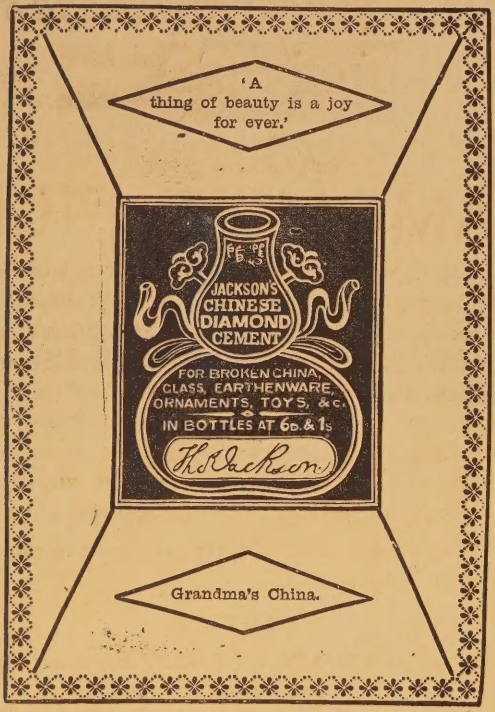
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